THE THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF GEORGE MACDONALD

by

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EXTRACT

Through the imaginative literary genius of the Scottish author George MacDonald (1824-1905) an exploration of the Mystery of Man and his/her relationship with and to God is explored along the lines of Theological Anthropology. Myth and the literary genre of fantasy (which, like religion is moral in character and relies on relationships with supernatural forces) are explored as vehicles for transmitting and articulating deep truths about what it means to be human.

Moral and spiritual growth are explored from psychological sources (Existential and Humanistic Schools of Psychology), and religious sources (Cambridge Platonists and Thomistic Theology) with the goal seen as the perfection of love --deification; And this understood as an irrevocable destiny for all rational creatures.

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Introduction

In the Second Vatican Council's "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" there is a good description of the universal reasons for why people turn to religion:

> Men look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence. The problems that weigh heavily on the hearts of men are the same today as in the ages past. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behavior, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?[1]

To the degree that religion genuinely answers these fundamental questions for humanity it serves to bring meaning, direction, peace, freedom, fulfillment, and happiness to Mankind. Conversely, if religion gives the wrong answers, humanity suffers: human fulfillment is stifled and a type of psychological enslavement ensues.

Unfortunately, it has often happened in the past that organised religion has sought control rather than the imparting of the freedom of the Gospel and has preyed upon the fear of the unknown after death by threatening and promising eternal punishments or rewards in exchange for obedience to the

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[1] "Nostra Aetate", 28th October, 1965. Vatican II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, Austin Flannery, Gen. ed., (Northport, New York: Costello Pub. Co., 1981) no. 1, p.738.

authority of the institution. This type of "religion", a religion of institutional self-preservation, has served to place God in ill repute and has been an enemy rather than a guide and friend to those sincerely seeking the growth and fulfillment of their humanity.

At its core, organised religions' seeking to control rather than facilitate growth, bespeaks a lack of trust in the human being as being capable of choosing self-enriching growth in spite of the many errors and mistakes the individual makes, and ultimately it shows a lack of trust in the God who made them the way they are, and the Christ who so meekly came to redeem them. The Russian author Dostoevsky highlighted this attitude of mistrust in God and humanity in a chapter of his novel The Bothers Karamazov. The chapter, entitled "The Grand Inquisitor" tells of Christ coming back to walk the earth in Seville during the height of the Inquisition. Right after raising a dead child to life at the steps of the cathedral, he is arrested by the Grand Inquisitor and thrown into a dungeon. The Inquisitor later visits him and asks Jesus why he has come. Christ remains silent and the Inquisitor goes on to tell him that they, the Church, know better about what humanity needs than He does. The Inquisitor cites the "wisdom" of the devil in the three temptations in the desert as things which would really have united humanity --Bread, miracles, unity by force--[2] and goes on to tell of the terror and burden that freedom is to Man, and

[2] Fyodor Dostoevsky. The Karamazov Brothers, trans. by Ignat Avsey, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

that they, by appeasing the consciences of men and women by deciding what is right and what is wrong, have relieved them from this terrifying burden. He reprimands Christ who instead insisted on offering them freedom and thirsted after their love rather than control over them.

In addition to religion having subverted itself and become a means of controlling mankind, theologians have also failed humanity by reducing religion to a relationship with an external God, not a God in whom "we live and move and have our being" at all times and in every place and who fills all of creation with His Glory. On the one hand, by conceiving Him as a personal God, separate from His creation, they have opened the door to the possibility of an inter-personal relationship with Him; yet, at the same time, by stressing a creation made "ex nihilo", from nothing,[3] they have distanced Him from being in and part of every happening of our life and growth. Instead of such things as suffering and death being within the confines of his love, suffused with Being itself, they instead, become proofs of his distance and obscurity, and even of his non-existence.

Theology ought rather to facilitate a trust in the life the Father has given, and especially in the Father of that life, which carries one beyond human reason to deep intuition into the

[3] Boethius asked the obvious question: if God made creation "from nothing," then where does it come from?
We seem so intent upon freeing God from any necessity in regard to creation, that we have excised Him from it to the detriment of the deep, all-encompassing relationship which we are called to share with Him. The fear of pantheism has resulted in atheism.

Origin, Sustainer, and Ultimate answer of the mystery itself. Theology and religion need to be revelatory in this kind of way.

A Turn to the Subject

The search to interface life and religion in a meaningful way has led to a more person-centred approach to theology, a theological anthropology. By the term "theological anthropology" is meant the human being understood as always within a vital relationship with God (presupposing a transcendental aspect to human nature) and never understood in a static or isolated stance. The understanding of Man viewed as vitally and always in-relation-to God speaks of a **dynamic interaction** of relational dependence upon God "for his origin, nature, condition, dignity and destiny" (Fichtner).

In the study of theology, this has taken the path of a shift to the human subject as the locus for doing theology. And this, not simply in the sense of determining whether Man has a capacity to receive revelation and communication with God; but rather, seeing human nature itself as a primary source of God's revelation through creation. This shift to the subject affects the approach to the study of all the established fields of theology (Natural, dogmatic, moral etc.) such that a complementarity is sought whereby one "source" of revelation (human nature) is not at odds with another "source"(Biblical Revelation). In its understanding of the mystery of Man, then, it seeks to do justice both to what Biblical revelation tells us

about the human being and to what Man has learned about himself through historical reflection and through an on-going dialogue with the various branches of the social sciences, especially psychology, sociology and anthropology: these, so that the human mode of operation is both recognised and respected. It also owes a good deal to Existential Philosophy and Phenomenology for their insistence on the importance of the subject in his/her individual unique historical circumstances, both personal and social, as well as the importance of the person's own perception of his situation and of the freedom and responsibility that s/he has. Through these sources of truth about Man, mutually informing one another, there is facilitated in an especially fecund way, the living of an enriching personal life within the context of the Mystery in which we find ourselves.

With regard to the making of theological statements about God, the shift to the subject as the centre of orientation means that Theological Anthropology views as meaningful or significant only those statements which include the human subject in its talk about God, otherwise, it is, if not dubious, certainly irrelevant to the person. And although this emphasis has been criticized as reducing God to the word of man[4], how else will it

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[4] Such criticism came from Karl Barth in reaction to the tragedy of the First World War, in his work The Epistle to the Romans (1918, 2nd. ed. 1922) where he declares that God is "wholly other", and that the message of salvation is:

> not a religious message to inform mankind of their divinity or to tell them how they may become divine. The Gospel proclaims a God utterly distinct from men. Salvation comes to them from Him, because they are, as men, incapable of knowing Him, and because they have
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> (continued...)

be of interest to Man. It is precisely this approach which makes God and religion meaningful and relevant.

Another consideration is that without a "shift to the subject" in the study of theology, revelation itself can become contradictory. For example, the command to love God with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength is a psychological impossibility for a healthy human being if God is not perceived as wholly trustworthy. Such notions as predestination, eternal torment for ourselves or our loved ones, etc., render such a view of God as untrustworthy, and hence there arises a contradiction between the operation of a human nature made by God and a commandment of God upon that human nature. Similarly, the application of the moral code must be sensitive to the human being for which it is meant. For example, the Ten Commandments disclosed by God are in themselves binding upon Man. However, the recognition of such factors as the inviolability of man's conscience (only worked out in the Middle Ages) and what constitutes a human act --knowledge and freedom (even now receiving new insights from modern psychology, for example, in reference to compulsive behaviour)-- go into making those commandments genuinely enriching to Man rather than rigid guilt-inducing enslavements.

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[4](...continued)
no right to claim anything from Him."

This statement bespeaks the ineffectuality of religion, which, in his view, reduced God to Man and therefore could not raise Man out of his predicament. But if God is wholly other, how can Man have an intimate relationship with Him or why would he even care to.

George MacDonald

Within the context of a theological anthropology, our search for theological insights and approaches to fulfill the pressing need for theology to offer meaningful growth and direction to mankind has led us to study the writings of the 19th century Scottish author George MacDonald. MacDonald was constantly doing theological anthropology although he did not call it by that name. His writings are imaginative and thought-provoking. His love of Mankind and his love of God drove him to break through the theological barriers of his time, and indeed, through many present day barriers, in order to do justice to both God and Man and their relationship. MacDonald's appreciation of human nature as the original gift of God, with its ability to learn and change, its mode of operation: freely choosing only that which is perceived as self-enriching, etc., informs his view of God's Nature such that there is a perception of God which bespeaks the possibility of a relationship as total and deep as that which Christ prayed for, that we might be one in Him as He is in the Father, in a communion of love. (Jn. 17)

He had an appreciation and deep respect for human nature seen as both created by God and redeemed by God, taking into account such factors as: how we learn --learning by firsthand experience, often through mistakes; human freedom; the innate sense of justice we experience: in relation to ourselves (betraying our sense of the ideal self) and in relation to our neighbour with regard to sin and suffering, forgiveness and

recompense.

The employment of Imagination

One of MacDonald's best gifts was his imagination. Through imagination, enlivened by a deep faith, he brings to tangible reality aspects of eschatological happiness which bridge the rational gap between pain, suffering, disaster, etc., and the goodness of God, and through a foretaste of the life to come he puts to silence the question of whether the sufferings in life are worth it. He also, through the genre of fantasy literature, is able to show the often fragmentary and hidden relationship between truth, goodness, beauty, and happiness in a clear light.[5] One of his sons wrote of the fantasy landscapes which his father created:

> It is the land where truth and beauty is easily explained in the vernacular; the land where the life lost for love is found in glory; the land where love is the reward of love, and never the price. The land of no bargains, where the ego reaches its apotheosis in something better than Nirvana.[6]

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[5] Walter Kasper says "The only replacement for human fulfillment and for the utopian ideal of a reality that is unrent, undivided, and successful is art. According to classical philosophy the beautiful is the sensible manifestation of the idea; it is freedom made manifest or, in the language of today's thinkers,the anticipation of definitive reconciliation.(cf. Plato, Phaedo 251d; Symposium 209a-212; Augustine de vera religione 41, 77 in CCL 32, 273f.; G.W.F. Hegel, Forlungen uber die Asthetik 1 in WW XII, ed. K. Glockner, 153ff.)
In a work of art, then, there is, at least according to the classical understanding of art, a foretaste to that which the Christian looks to with hope as to be accomplished by the Holy Spirit; the transfiguration of reality." (The God of Jesus Christ, tr. by M. O'Connell, New York: Crossroad, 1989) p. 200

[6] Ronald MacDonald. "George MacDonald" an essay in From a Northern Window: Papers Critical Historical and Imaginative (London: James Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1911) p. 62.

MacDonald's understanding of God in relation to the human being was one of all-embracing Father, "Whose life was deeper in us than our own". So deep that when Man had a new insight it was "think being thought" --God working in us from the very depths of our being working his way out to our conscious understanding so that we might claim and make our own, through free choice, the irrevocable gift of life and love which He gives to us. With God as the very root of our inmost being as well as His permeating all of creation, we are never out of his care; and this brings with it a confidence which expands the human spirit.

We hope to shed light on the above statements and to highlight the thought of George MacDonald as it applies to the perennial needs of men and woman in their search for growth and happiness in relation to the Mystery of life. The last three chapters are especially focused on the conditions necessary for human growth in-relation-to God, or for those who don't believe in God, simply understood as relation to the Source of their life. In the last chapter we seek to examine the ways of growth and to define the human being as "learner" or "discoverer".

Chapter I

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

George MacDonald was born in Huntly, Aberdeenshire in 1824. He was the second of nine children (two of his brothers died in infancy and the last three children were born of a second marriage, his own mother dying when he was eight). Two things bearing on his theology stand out during his childhood, one was the grim Calvinist environment and the other was his love and admiration for his father and the beneficent love of his father for him.

The contemporary theologians who had the greatest influence on him were A.J. Scott, Thomas Erskine, and F.D. Maurice. However, he was also influenced by various other contemporary writers and poets, as well as earlier writers such as William Law, who knew Tauler, Suso, Ruysbroeck, Irenaeus, Basil, Hilary of Poitiers, (among others) and through Law, the German mystic Jacob Boehme. His major biographer William Raeper remarks that:

> MacDonald's writings are shot through with ideas culled from Maurice, Erskine, F.W. Robertson, Coleridge, and German theologians, but these men's writings should be seen acting on him rather as dye on cloth - colours merge echoes of other hues are visible - but the final mix, the colour is MacDonald's own.[1]

In addition to the quasi-contemporaneous theologians and poets which Raeper speaks of, a significant strand of thought can also

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[1]William Raeper. George MacDonald, (Herts, England: Lion Publishing plc, 1987) p. 242.

be detected as coming from the Cambridge Platonists (Benjamin Whichcote, John Smith, Ralph Cudworth, and Henry More[2]) with regard to such ideas as "the seed of Christ in man", man as "naturally supernatural", salvation through moral perfection; these having an influence on and a commonality of thought with William Law, which were reintroduced into the religious world via Carlyle, the Scottish philosophers, and Unitarian preachers like Edward Taggart.

The Romantic poets such as Coleridge[3] (already mentioned by Raeper) and Wordsworth, as well as German romantics, especially Friedrich von Hardenberg, known as Novalis, played an important role in MacDonald's thinking, and confirmed his own attitude with regard to such fundamental elements in his theology as the understanding of Nature as an intimately connected whole; and of imagination and the use of fantasy and myth to convey deep realities with regard to goodness and death and God's presence

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[2] The Cambridge Platonists were familiar with Jacob Boehme and looked favourably on his writings, especially in regard to Christ's interior activity within the soul. In his preface to The Way of Christ, G. Moreton writes:

> "Henry More, a professor at Cambridge ... pronounced in their favour; although he owned there were some things in them he did not then understand....The professor was convinced that Jacob Boehme had been specially awakened for the purpose of correcting and guiding those who believed merely in an external Christ, without regard to having the Spirit within themselves." (Canterbury: 1894).

Interior change is, for these men and for George MacDonald, the central goal and ground of union with God.

[3] Coleridge and Carlyle are discussed in the Chapter II in relation to poetic imagination and symbol.

within and about all things.

He worked all of these various elements into a unified whole, impelled by an inward need to make meaningful human existence in the light of an all-good loving Father. He did this, above all, by listening to his conscience and his heart, putting into action and testing what was true, and trusting his imagination to discover and guide his action into further truth. He was an original and courageous thinker.

The Missionar Kirk[4]

Macdonald's grandparents initially belonged to the established Church (his grandfather was formerly a Catholic, but for various reasons joined the Church of Scotland and even became a deacon in it), however, his grandmother became dissatisfied with the Church of Scotland and so they next joined the Missionar Kirk, a Congregational denomination with an evangelical aim. They were known for their lengthy services (sometimes more than five hours even in the cold of winter[5]), strict keeping of the sabbath, (not even a walk being permitted), abstention from alcoholic beverages, music, etc.. His grandmother is said to have burned her son's violin and in MacDonald's novel Robert Falconer (1868), he characterizes her as the protagonist's grandmother:

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[4]"The Missionars derived their name from their support of missionary work overseas, and this nickname, though meant to be derogatory, was adopted with pride." Robert Troup. The Missionar Kirk of Huntly, (Edinburgh and Glasgow: John Menzies and Co., 1901) Preface, p. ii.

[5] Ibid. p. 51.

stern, unsmiling, yet loving in her own way, who burns her grandson's violin for fear that it might lead him down the wrong path.

This grandmother is also said to have done away with whatever family ornaments were stored in the family "chanter kist" or treasure chest, as well as the Catholic family history stored therein.[6]

This bleak life-style, and the theology that underlay it, was combined with a doctrine of salvation which had undergone quite a deformation since the time of Calvin and Knox. The Federalist theologians[7] after Knox had worked out what they called a "Covenant of Redemption"[8] existing between the Father and the Son through the Son's obedience. This was a pact which determined how many souls would be included in the already limited atonement, and as such, was supposed to be a consolation in that the figure that he and the Father did arrive at was now guaranteed by the Son. This sort of theology brought into question the very notion of a God of Love, let alone a God of fairness - many souls not even given a chance for salvation; as well as calling into question the very unity of the nature of

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[6]Greville MacDonald. George MacDonald and His Wife, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1924) p. 28.

[7] Their name comes from the Latin "foedus", covenant, since they presented their theology in terms of God making various covenants with Man beginning with Adam and a covenant of works.

[8] M. Charles Bell. Calvin and Scottish Theology, (Edinburgh: Handsell Press, 1985) Bell says that the federalist theologian Rutherford refers to this "Covenant" as "a bargain of buying people to God". p. 73.

the Trinity. MacDonald relates to us in his novel Weighed and Wanting (1882) that:

> I well remember feeling as a child that I did not care for God to love me if he did not love everybody: the kind of love I needed was the love that all men needed, the love that belonged to their nature as children of the father, a love he could not give me except he gave it to all men.[9]

He continued as a Congregationalist through his university years but went through deep struggles and trials of faith. He received an enlarging of his vision, when, due to financial difficulties at home, he was forced to take a year off. For half the term he worked cataloguing a library for a nobleman in the far north of Scotland. This introduced him to Romantic and German literature which offered a wealth of new ideas to the young student. In his novel The Portent (1864), the nearly nineteen year old protagonist Duncan Campbell (same age as MacDonald when he catalogued the library) takes a position tutoring two boys in a house whose library he describes in detail and which is generally thought to be a description of the library he catalogued and its impression and influence upon him:

> Now I was in my element. I had never been by any means a bookworm but the very outside of a book had a charm to me. It was a kind of sacrament --an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace; as indeed, what on God's earth is not? So I set to work amongst the books, and soon became familiar with many titles at least, which had been perfectly unknown to me before. I found a perfect set of our poets -- perfect according to the notion of the editor and the issue of the publisher, although it omitted both Chaucer and George Herbert. I began to nibble at that

[9] George MacDonald. Weighed and Wanting (1882), (London: Edwin Dalton Publishers, 1908) p. 30.

> portion of the collection which belonged to the sixteenth century; but with little success. I found nothing, to my idea, but love poems without any love in them, and so I soon became weary. But I found in the library what I liked far better --many romances of a very marvelous sort, and plentiful interruption they gave to the formation of the catalogue. I likewise came across a whole nest of German classics, which seemed to have kept their places undisturbed, in virtue of their unintelligibility --I found in these volumes a mine of wealth inexhaustive.[10]

After his studies at the University of Aberdeen, where he received a Master of Arts degree (his speciality being science and chemistry), he spent two years working in London as a tutor while trying to decide what to do with his life. During this time he wrote to his father describing his spiritual state of mind:

> My greatest difficulty always is "How do I know my faith is of a lasting kind such as will produce fruits?"...My error seems to be always searching for faith in place of contemplating the truths of the gospel which produce faith.[11]

This preoccupation with knowing whether one has a lasting or saving faith was one of the departures Knox made with Calvin. Knox agreed with Calvin that when plagued with doubts, temptations, and even falls one should keep his eyes on Christ, but, as Charles Bell points out:

> Unfortunately Knox does not always adhere to this type of counsel. For example, at one point in his exhortation, Knox mentions that even the apostles

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[10] George MacDonald. The Portent (1864) (London: Smith Elder, 1864) p. 60.

[11] Greville MacDonald. George MacDonald and His Wife, opus cit., pp. 92-93.

> denied Christ and yet were "restored to comfort". But the question is put to him as to how one can know that faith has not been lost completely if we deny Christ. Knox answers that we can determine definitely whether we have saving faith by examining ourselves for the presence of the fruit of the spirit.[12]

Knox also gave other means of self-discovery in regard to "saving faith", especially in correspondence with his mother-in-law, who felt tried by Satan. Knox assured her that this too was a sign of election, however, when she fell into utter indifference he was at a loss as to how to assure her. Bell rightly concludes on the subject that "making our assurance to depend upon something discernible within ourselves, we actually lose assurance and become subject to the tyranny of our feelings".[13] MacDonald was tossed about by this uncertainty until he realised that he must look to the gospel which produces faith and not to himself. This crisis led him to a re-reading of the gospel without the presuppositions of his youth. A year and a half later than the above letter, he wrote to his father again, saying:

> I love my bible more - I am always finding out something new in it - I seem to have had to learn over again from the beginning - All my teaching in youth seems useless to me. I must get it all from the bible again.[14]

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[12] M. Charles Bell. Calvin and Scottish Theology, opus cit., p. 44.

[13] Ibid. p. 45. While MacDonald held that religion must be based on a personal, tangible relationship with God whose presence could be sensed, he always opposed religion based on feelings which shift as the person's moods shifted.

[14] Letter dated 11 April 1847. Housed at the Yale University Library. Quoted from George MacDonald by William Raeper. opus cit., p. 237.

This re-reading and re-learning from the gospel was done in the light of the romantic poets (as Raeper also suggests) and began an inevitable break with Calvinist theology and with the God of the Calvinists, of whom, MacDonald was later to write:

> They yield the idea of the Ancient of Days, "the glad creator" and put in its stead a miserable, puritanical martinet of a God, caring not for righteousness, but for his rights; not for the eternal purities, but for the goodly properties. The prophets of such a God take all the glow , all the hope, all the colour, all the worth, out of life on earth, and offer you instead what they call eternal bliss - a pale, tearless hell.[15]

While in London, being unable to foresee the extent of his future difficulties with the Church, he decided to study for the ministry. He was only required to study for two years since he already had a university degree. He did these studies at Highbury College in London from 1848-51. It was while here that he met A.J. Scott.

A.J. Scott and Thomas Erskine

A.J. Scott had, some twenty years earlier, been through the same theological difficulties that assailed MacDonald. He was friends with John McLeod Campbell and Thomas Erskine and during the Row Controversy (1828-31) Scott was deprived of his licence to preach by the Paisley Presbytery because of his disagreement on three points with the Westminster Confession, namely, limited

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[15]George MacDonald. from the sermon of the 3rd series entitled "Justice" in Unspoken Sermons, Series I (1867), II (1885), and III (1889), (Whitehorn California: Johannesen Pub. Co., 1997 reprint of 1867 edition of Alexander Strahan, London Series I and the 1886 and 1889 editions of Alexander Strahan and Longmans, Green & Co., London) p. 540.

atonement (which had troubled MacDonald from his youth), the Sabbath, and the theology of ordination. While MacDonald was at Highbury, he often attended Scott's lectures at the Marylebone Institute in London and got to know him personally. Scott had taken the Chair of English Language and Literature at University College in 1848. He was a remarkable man, with a broad learning and a genuine interest in the poor and the education of working men and women. He helped found Queen's College, London which was for the education of women, as well as serving as joint professor of Literature and Philosophy at Bedford College, again a college for women. His broad view of salvation, his knowledge and love of literature, and his concern for the poor all attracted MacDonald. Scott became one of MacDonald's closest friends and introduced him to a whole circle of others, including Thomas Erskine. Two years after Scott's death, on the dedicatory page of MacDonald's novel Robert Falconer (1868) he expresses his admiration for him: "To the memory of the man who stands highest in the oratory of my memory, Alexander John Scott, I, daring, presume to dedicate this book".[16]

MacDonald only lasted three years as a Congregationalist minister before being pressured to leave (which we will discuss below). He then moved to Manchester, where Scott had been appointed as the first Principal of Owen's College, and from whom he received much support. While there he published his first work Within and Without (1855), a poetic story of love and

[16] Unfortunately, little record remains of Scott's thought for he did not publish much except for a few pamphlets.

reconciliation after death. Through Scott's circle of friends Erskine read the work and was much impressed by it, saying "I like it better than any poetry and most prose that I have read in many years".[17] MacDonald got to know Erskine who at this time was a confirmed believer in Universal Salvation. But what he had especially in common with Erskine was Erskine's insistence on the need of Man to have confidence in a loving Father.[18] The character of God being a key factor to the human beings response. (We take this theme up again below in the chapter on Religion and Psychology.) The need for the human being to be psychologically satisfied with regard to what faith teaches is what both Erskine and more so, MacDonald, in their tender-heartedness, had in common and is what theological anthropology is much concerned with today --the interface between Man as he is by God's creation and his response, as Man so created, to God, in a healthy and life-enhancing way.

Forgiveness

From Erskine's idea of pardon in The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel (1828), that is, that pardon is universally given by

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[17] From a letter written to Mrs. Russel Gurney by Thomas Erskine in July 1855. Quoted from George MacDonald and His Wife by Greville MacDonald, opus cit., p. 292.

[18] For example, in his introduction to Extracts of Letters to a Christian Friend from a Lady (Greenock: 1830) Erskine writes:

> If the law really requires love, then nothing short of a personal assurance of being loved and forgiven can be a sufficient motive, for it is absolutely certain that no man can love God or look upon Him otherwise than as an enemy until he knows that He has forgiven him his sins and loves him as a Father; (p. xxxi).

God and that all that remains and is especially needed, is Man's perceiving it and responding to it; MacDonald appropriates and applies to the relation between individuals, one human being's pardon to another. For him, the question of how we are to forgive from our heart is an important question within the framework of human psychology and Jesus' command to forgive from our hearts if we are to be forgiven.

His first attempt to articulate this is in his novel David Elginbrod (1863). In the novel, the protagonist, Hugh Sutherland, a young man who had been working as a tutor on a Scottish estate befriends and is befriended by David Elginbrod, a middleaged man of Christ-like kindness and wisdom who works on the farm as foreman. Hugh has little association with the Laird and his wife, but is welcomed at David's home. He begins teaching David and his daughter a few evenings a week and receives from them in return love and friendship. When Hugh leaves the post he loses touch with them through his own neglect. Two or three years later, when faced with troubles, Hugh begins to realize how much he had gained from David's friendship and how he had enriched him; and so he writes to that effect, asking for pardon for having neglected so good a friend. The reply comes from his daughter as David has died. She offers pardon in her father's name as he himself would have given it:

> Dear Mr. Sutherland, --Your letter to my father has been sent to me by my mother, for what you will feel to be the sad reason, that he is no more in this world. But I cannot say it is so **very** sad to me to think that he is gone home, where my mother and I will soon join him. True love can wait well. Nor indeed, dear Mr Sutherland, must you be too much troubled that

> your letter never reached him. My father was like God in this, that he always forgave anything the moment there was anything to forgive; for when else could there be such a good time?--although, of course, the person forgiven must not know it til he ask for forgiveness. Dear Mr. Sutherland....I forgive you, in his name, for anything and everything you reproach yourself in regard to him...[19]

This is a wonderful way to forgive, but how does one forgive so completely when one is still hurt? In a later novel Sir Gibbie (1879) he addresses this issue. On the one hand, he notes that to forgive relieves us of the burden of hate, but on the other hand, to forgive requires that somehow justice is done or will be done. Otherwise, there follows an inner turmoil and repression in spite of the Christian having overtly forgiven. It is a "forgiveness" within which the person is still harbouring hurt and bitterness.

There are two examples of forgiveness in Sir Gibbie, and they are based on MacDonald's presupposition that everyone is coming one day to Salvation; and this "salvation" is understood as the inner transformation of the person, with all that that entails with regard to the person's learning until s/he perceives things as they actually are from God's point of view and having a genuine change of heart and mind.

Forgiveness -Sir Gibbie

In the section on "Religion and Psychology" we touch on the problem of forgiveness and present MacDonald's imaginative

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[19] George MacDonald. David Elginbrod (1863) (London: Hurst and Blackett, Ltd. no date) Bk. III, ch. 4.

solutions to "guilt" in a future state in which there will be the opportunity to make up to those we have hurt by doing them good in many wonderous ways. But what of forgiveness? what of the one who is wronged? The Gospel is clear that we must forgive from our hearts, if we ourselves are to receive forgiveness. It is one of the petitions in the Our Father and our Lord commands it in many places in the Gospel.

In MacDonald's novel Sir Gibbie (1879), we encounter a Christ-like child -eight year old Sir Gibbie Galbraith. He is a mute ragamuffin who wanders the streets of the "granite city" from morning til night. MacDonald describes him as "the town-sparrow". His mother died when he was still an infant and his father is a drunken shoemaker. Gibbie's great joy is snuggling in his father's bosom at night. When his father dies of alcoholism, Gibbie is left an orphan and for another two years continues his wandering about the city. When MacDonald describes him as the town sparrow, he represents him as free, both from the physical constraints of earning a living and from the moral constraints of guilt. He is an innocent who neither commits evil nor sees evil in others. However, his life is shattered with bewilderment when he witnesses the murder of a friendly black sailor. He immediately flees from the city. He flees not out of a fear of bodily harm, but rather "from horror". MacDonald tells us that "His faith in men seemed ruined"[20]

[20] George MacDonald. Sir Gibbie (1879) (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., Everyman's Library, no date) ch. 8, p. 51.

He makes his way "up Daurside", that is up along the main river of the town out to the countryside. He had heard his father use the expression in regard to property they once owned there and with that as his guide Gibbie sets out. He eats some turnips he finds along the way (he is ignorant that they might belong to some farmer) and shares the hospitality of a friendly dog one night in the dog's house. He eventually takes up residence in a large barn on a farm and hides there. He can't help observing what work is being carried out about him. He soon discovers a passage to the kitchen ceiling from the barn and each night he creeps down and cleans the kitchen as he has clandestinedly observed the woman of the house doing. He also does clandestine work around the barn and soon the residents of the house are believing that there is a "broonie" about. Jean Mavor, the house owner's sister and mistress of the house thinks that the herdboy Donal Grant is the one doing her housework and so rewards him each day by packing him a larger than usual lunch. During the days, we find Gibbie helping Donal watch the cattle and Donal has been sharing his lunch with the "poor cratur", a lunch which has become more and more plentiful for a reason which is unknown to Donal. MacDonald shows a lovely Providence at work in the feeding of Gibbie by way of his own hidden work.

The local Laird soon gets wind of there being a "broonie" at the "muckle hoose" and sets Fergus Duff, a college student, to see if he can trap him. The Laird has a hatred for superstition and is incensed that such a carry-on is taking place in his domain. Fergus hides himself in a corner of the kitchen for a couple of

nights and soon captures Gibbie. He brings him to the Laird who questions the mute without response other than a smile. He orders his game-keeper Angus MacPholp to whip him for his insolence and so to loosen his tongue. Angus begins his task, but Gibbie escapes from Angus when the Laird's young daughter sees what is going on and rushes to the aid of the poor child who has now been rendered unconscious by the second lash (the two lashes have left a large cross on Gibbies back signifying him as a Christ figure). Gibbie regains his consciousness and flees from the shed stark naked. Yet, even in this condition MacDonald admires him:

> And now Sir Gibbie, though not much poorer than he had been, really possessed nothing separable, except his hair and his nail -nothing therefore that he could call **his**, as distinguished from **him**. His sole other possession was of a negative quantity -his hunger, namely, for he had not even a meal in his body....He was not nearly reduced to extremity yet though -this little heir of the world: in his body he had splendid health, in his heart a great courage, and in his soul an ever throbbing love.[21]

Gibbie eventually wanders to the door of a cottage high in the hills. It is the home of Janet Grant, a saintly old woman, and her husband Robert. Janet is home alone when Gibbie wanders up to the cottage. When she sees him she is filled with compassion and lifts him up and carries him to her own bed. She gives him some warm milk and he soon falls asleep. It is a Saturday evening and her children, who work in various situations around the mountain, are coming to spend the evening with her and her husband as was their custom. In her conversation with them we

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[21] Ibid.

learn about forgiveness:

> At length a hand came to the latch, and mother and daughter greeted as mother and daughter only can; then came a son.... They kept on arriving singly to the number of six....Each, as he or she came, Janet took to the bed, and showed [the child]...where he slept. Each time she showed him, to secure like pity with her own, she turned down the bedclothes, and revealed the little back, smitten with the eternal memorial of the divine perfection. The women wept. The young men were furious, each after his fashion.
>
> "God damn the rascal 'at did it!" cried one of them, clenching his teeth, and forgetting himself quite in the rage of the moment.
>
> "Laddie, tak back the word," said his mother calmly. "Gien ye dinna forgie yer enemies, ye'll no be for-gi'en yersel'."
>
> "That's some hard, mither," answered the offender, with an attempted smile.
>
> "Hard!" she echoed; "it may weel be hard, for it canna be helpit. What wad be the use o' forgiein' ye, or hoo cud it win at ye, or what wad ye care for't, or mak o't, carryin' a hell o' hate i' yer verra hert? For gien God be love, hell maun be hate. My bairn, them 'at winna forgie their enemies, cairries sic a nest o' deevilry i' their ain boasoms, 'at the verra speerit o' God himsel' canna win in till't for bein' scom-fished (sickened) wi' smell an' reik. Muckle guid wad only pardon dee to sic! But unce lat them un'erstan' 'at he canna forgie them, an' maybe they'll be fleyt (scared), an' turn again' the Sawtan 'at's i' them."
>
> "Weel, but he's no **my** enemy," said the youth.
>
> "No your enemy!" returned the mother; "-no your enemy, an' sair (serve) a bairn like that! My certy (to be sure)! but he's the enemy o' the haill race o' man-kin'. He trespasses unco sair against **me**, I'm weel sure o' that! An' I'm glaid o' 't. I'm glaid 'at he has me for ane o' 'is enemies, for I forgie him for ane; an wuss him sae affrontit wi' himsel' er' a' be dune, 'at he wad fain hide his heid in a midden (dunghill)."
>
> "Noo noo, mither!" said the eldest son, who had not yet spoken, but whose countenance had been showing a mighty indignation, "that's surely as sair a bannin' as yon 'at Jock said."
>
> "What, laddie! Wad ye hae a fellow-cratur live to a'

> eternity ohn been ashamed o' sic a thing 's that? Wad that be to wuss him weel? Kenna ye 'at the mair shame the mair grace? My word was the best beginnin' o' better 'at cud wuss him. Na, na, laddie! frae my verra hert, I wuss he may be that affrontit wi' himsel' 'at he canna sae muckle as lift up 's een to h'aven, but maun smite upo' 's breist an' say: God, be mercifu' to me a sinner! That's my curse upo' **him**, for I wadna hae 'im a deevil. Whan he comes to think that shame o' himsel', I'll tak him to my hert, as I tak the bairn he misguidit. Only I doobt I'll be lang awa afore that, for it taks time to fess a man like that till's holy senses."[22]

The fact that all **must** come to conversion and that that conversion is a merciful necessity for their happiness, permits Janet to wish on him a punishment which will produce in him a keen sense of shame so that the wrongdoer, as a mercy and not in vengeance will come to his senses. It satisfies both our need for justice and our need to love. It liberates. And, finally, when we are changed into Christ-like people, forgiveness itself is realised, and it cannot possibly be otherwise. But until that change occurs, we are enemies of our true selves and of all of humanity.

There is another passage in the novel where Janet expresses her doctrine on forgiveness. It is a minor incident, but again expresses the inexorability of our coming to perfection (the topic treated below in the last chapter) and of the forgiveness which we will automatically have towards one another when that happens. This is how the occasion for forgiveness comes about. Janet's daughter Nicie is working as a maid at the laird's house. Her younger brother Donal stops in to see her. He is met

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[22] George MacDonald. Sir Gibbie (1879), opus cit., pp. 139-140.

at the door by the house-keeper Mistress MacFarlane, who doesn't believe that he is her brother, but rather, a boyfriend, and sends him away. When Nicie later confronts her about it, she treats her in an off-hand fashion, telling her that her sisters were welcome, "but no brothers", hence, still not believing her, and bringing the conversation to a close by telling her to hold her tongue. Nicie becomes quite angry with her and later complains to her mother about it:

> "I cud hae jist gien her a guid cloot o' the lug (blow or slap to the ear) -I was that angert wi' her."
>
> "She'll be soary for't some day," said Janet, with a quiet smile; "an' what a body's sure to be soary for, ye may as weel forgie them at ance."
>
> "Hoo ken ye, mither, she'll be soary for 't?" asked Nicie, not very willing to forgive Mistress MacFarlane.
>
> "Cause the Maister says 'at we'll hae to pey the uttermost fardin'. There's naebody 'ill be latten aff. We maun dee oor neiper richt."
>
> "But michtna the Maister himsel' forgie her?" suggested Nicie, a little puzzled.
>
> "Lassie," said her mother solemnly, "ye dinna surely think 'at the Lord's forgifness is to lat fowk aff ohn repentit? That wad be a strange fawvour to grant them! He winna hurt mair not he can help; but the grue (horror) maun mak w'y for the grace. I'm sure it was sae whan I gied you yer whups, lass. I'll no sae aboot some o' the first o' ye, for at that time I didna ken sae weel what I was aboot, an' was mair angert while nor there was ony occasion for -tuik my beam to dang their motes. I hae been soar tribled aboot it, mony's the time."[23]

In this way MacDonald satisfies the divine command to forgive and the human need for justice. This frees the person from carrying around hate, and also allows the channel of reconciliation to be opened for future love. And, it mirrors

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[23] Ibid. p. 199.

God's own way of forgiving, that is, by bringing people to repentance -change of heart; thus they can truly say "if I could go back, I would do things differently". Then, reconciliation is the natural outcome.

Erskine, we feel, was also instrumental in helping MacDonald come to grips with refuting the notion of penal substitution which his Calvinist upbringing taught. MacDonald simply adopts Erskine's view that God, as he understood Him -just and loving- could not punish an innocent man. Secondly, MacDonald felt that a God who sought suffering for justice's sake alone was not a God to be loved or believed in. He expresses this in his novel What's Mine's Mine (1886) in a conversation between a mother, who holds to the traditional beliefs and a son who does not:

> "Oh Ian! Ian! ... you will not give Christ the glory of satisfying divine justice by his suffering for your sins!"
>
> "Mother, to say that the justice of God is satisfied with suffering is a piece of the darkness of hell. God is willing to suffer, and ready to inflict suffering to save from sin, but suffering is not satisfaction to him of his justice.
>
> "Did Jesus deserve punishment? If not, then to punish him was to wrong him.
>
> "He yielded to injustice - but the injustice was man's not God's.
>
> "It is an eternal satisfaction to love [,] to suffer for the guilty, but not to justice that innocence should suffer for the guilty."[24]

MacDonald's underlying concern here, as was Erskine's, was to

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[24]George MacDonald. What's Mine's Mine, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company Ltd., 1911) pp. 108-110.

rescue the very character of God from disrepute, so that he is perceived as One in whom a sinner can trust and love. As to the "Atonement", for MacDonald, the atonement was Christ's bringing an "at-one-ment", as he would divide the word, between Man and God. Christ telling and giving testimony to his wayward brothers and sisters of the Father's love: testifying to that love in a way which spoke to the inner needs and longings of His children, so that they would take a stand against themselves (their shadow self) with regard to sin, and confidently cry out to the Spirit within, the Spirit of Christ to help them to be what their "true selves" already sensed in their heart of hearts --God's very children.

His term as a Minister (1850-53)

We must retreat a bit to pick up the strand of MacDonald's history and his theological development. In 1850, at the age of twenty-five, MacDonald was holding theological views which spoke well of the character of God but were unacceptable to his parishioners. After leaving Highbury College, he took a Congregational parish at Arundel, where his orthodoxy began to be questioned. The chief objections raised against him were the following four: (1) His teaching on the Sabbath seemed lax to them. (2) "he had expressed his belief that some provision was made for the heathen after death"[25], something which would soon express itself in a belief in universal salvation; (3) a hope that the lower animals too would be sharers in the better life

[25] Greville MacDonald. George MacDonald and His Wife, opus cit., p. 178.

to come"[26] In his novel Castle Warlock (1882) he defends this position about animals on the grounds that animals can and do love and receive love and since all love comes from God and God is eternal, then they too will continue for as long as God wills them to.[27] For why should God's kindness and tenderheartedness be less than our own? This gives testimony and insight into what motivates MacDonald to do theology - his heart goes out to all that breaks the human heart, all suffering, and he feels impelled to find an answer commensurate with the goodness of God as he perceives him.

The fourth objection which MacDonald's parishioners at Arundel brought against him was that: "he was tainted with German Theology"[28] An accusation probably brought on by his having given out as Christmas gifts to some of his friends at Arundel a translation he had made of some of Novalis' songs. But indeed, even before he went down to London to work as a tutor he was familiar with the German Romantic poets and writers. Novalis especially influenced him with regard to such notions as spiritual evolution and the use and trust of the imagination as an insightful guide to God. He also learned from Novalis much

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[26] Ibid. p. 177. He held this possibility all his life and in his last fantasy novel Lilith (1895), the protagonist is filled with joy upon seeing his old pony in the New Jerusalem.

[27] The circumstances in the novel are presented below in the chapter on Religion and Psychology where the boy's whole outlook on life is opened and strengthened by this doctrine.

[28] Greville MacDonald. George MacDonald and His Wife, opus cit., p. 179. MacDonald later published a book of translations. They are mostly German authors, and include Novalis, Heine, Goethe, Hoffman, Schiller and Uhland, under the title of Rampoli: Exotics, Translations, Diary of an Old Soul.

about the genre of a fantasy or fairy story. He prefaces his first fantasy novel with a lengthy quote from Novalis which explains what this type of literature is about[29]; and in the closing chapters of both of his two major fantasy novels he leaves the reader with a hope expressed in these terms:

> Novalis says, "Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one"[30]

The imagination was one of MacDonald's greatest gifts. Rolland Hein says of MacDonald's use of the imagination that "MacDonald firmly believed that it is through the imagination that man may

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[29] "One can imagine stories without rational cohesion and yet filled with associations, like dreams, and poems that are merely lovely sounding, full of beautiful words, but also without rational sense and connection -with, at the most, individual verses which are intelligible, like fragments of the most varied things. This true Poesie can at most have a general allegorical meaning and an indirect effect, as music does. Thus is Nature so purely poetic, like the room of a magician or a physicist, like a children's nursery or a carpenter's shop....

"A fairy story is like a vision without rational connections, a harmonious whole of miraculous things and events -as, for example, a musical fantasia, the harmonic sequence of an Aeolion harp, indeed Nature itself.

"In a genuine fairy-story, everything must be miraculous, mysterious, and interrelated, everything must be alive, each in its own way. The whole of Nature must be wondrously blended with the whole world of the Spirit. In fairy-story the time of anarchy, lawlessness, freedom, the natural state of Nature makes itself felt in the world....The world of the fairy-story is that world which opposed throughout to the world of rational truth, and precisely for that reason it is so thoroughly an analogue to it, as Chaos is an analogue to the finished Creation." (Novalis, quoted from Phantastes (1858), Grand Rapids Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981, p. 3.)

[30] George MacDonald. Lilith (1895), (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981) p. 252. They are the closing lines of the novel.

In Phantastes (1858), (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981) p. 182. Here, they are one of the quotations he uses to head the final chapter.

reach the farthest toward truth....He [MacDonald] writes in his novel Paul Faber, Surgeon: It is God who gives thee thy mirror of imagination and if thou keep it clean, it will give thee back no shadow but the truth"[31] Trust in his imagination as a guide was reinforced by Coleridge and Carlyle as well.(We discuss theology and imagination in the next chapter.)

Returning to his difficulties with the parishioners at Arundel, the congregation cut his salary by a third with the hopes that he would leave. He stayed on for another year, however, not wanting to cause divisions in the congregation, he decided to resign. That was his final break with Calvinism and from then on he made his living primarily by writing. His books became his pulpit. He published over a forty-two year period and produced some fifty volumes. Of these, twenty-five could be classed as novels, three as prose-fantasy, five volumes of poetry, eight volumes of short stories and tales, four volumes of sermons based on scripture passages, and various other miscellaneous works. The amazing thing about them is their theological consistency. His ideas develop but don't change. By the time he began publishing, his basic theological views seem to have been formed.

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[31] Rolland Hein. The Harmony Within - The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: University Press, a subsidiary of Christian College Consortium and W.B. Eerdman Pub. Co., 1982) p. x of Introduction.

The Influence of His Father

The greatest influence on George MacDonald was his father, both in relation to life and to God. He had a great love, trust, and admiration for him. His mother had died when he was eight years old and his father, therefore, took on a dual role, or at least one of greater influence than usual in the development of the child. Throughout his life he enjoyed a genuine friendship with him. He was a man of great liberality, giving his children personal freedom to develop. He was ever approachable, kind, honest and understanding. Even when they disagreed on theological issues - his father was a deacon in the Missionar Kirk - there was always mutual respect.[32] In the dedicatory pages to his volume of poetry entitled The Hidden Life and Other Poems, he pays wonderful tribute to him:

> ...Thou hast been faithful to my highest need;
> And I, thy debtor, ever, evermore,
> Shall never feel the grateful burden sore.
> Yet most I thank thee, not for any deed,
> But for the sense thy living self did breed
> That fatherhood is at the great world's core.[33]

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[32] In his novel What's Mine's Mine, when the orthodox mother is in debate with her liberal son, she appeals to the fact that his deceased father had accepted the doctrine of "penal substitution". Now his father had been admirable in every way, hence the weight of the remark. In reply, the son says, "It was not my father who invented that way of accounting for the death of our Lord....He accepted it, saturated with the tradition of the elders before he could think for himself. He does not believe it now." (p. 110, opus cit..) It is quite likely that this was the same view he held concerning his own father's beliefs.

[33] George MacDonald. The Hidden Life and Other Poems, (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green Publishers, 1864) p. iii.

MacDonald realised that the good qualities which he saw in his own father must exist in God in at least the same measure,[34] and because of this and their relationship, an unlimited confidence in God the Father is what informs and guides the rest of his theology. Everything is viewed in this light and all that the imagination can bring to bear upon the subject comes forth, seeking to satisfy the deepest yearnings and hopes of the human heart. He was often criticized by his contemporaries[35], but, he was unshakable in this belief. For him, even doubts about God are to be had without fear of offending. In the final lines of

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[34] In a similar vein, one of his early realistic novels is based on an inscription found on a gravestone, which was related to MacDonald by the journalist Manby Smith:

> Here lies I, Martin Elginbrodde;
> Hae mercy o' my soul, Lord God;
> As I wad do, were I Lord God,
> And ye were Martin Elginbrodde.

David Elginbrod (1863) opus cit., p. 63. The circumstances of when and how Smith told MacDonald of this epitaph can be found in George MacDonald and His Wife by Greville MacDonald, op. cit., pp. 320-321.

[35] e.g., A contemporary of MacDonald, the Rev. S. Law Wilson, in his book The Theology of Modern Literature (Edinburgh: T.T.Clark Pub., 1899) is critical of MacDonald and complains:

> "he regards himself as specially anointed to preach the Fatherhood of God and the Gospel of Eternal Hope....[for MacDonald] all the attributes of Deity are subordinate to love, and resolvable into love".(pp. 295,298)

Law then invokes the theology of Dr. Forsyth of Cambridge in support of his opposition to MacDonald's theology:

> "God is love is not the whole gospel. Love is not evangelical til it has dealt with holy law....There is a kind of consecration that would live close to the Father, but it does not always take seriously enough the holiness which makes the fatherhood of the Cross awful, inexhaustible, as full of judgment as salvation" (p. 297, Law is quoting from The Holy Father and the Living Christ, p. 12)

his poem "The Disciple" he expresses this:

> The man who feareth, Lord, to doubt,
> in that fear doubteth thee.[36]

God: Father and Mother

The "Fatherhood" of God, for MacDonald, embraced both masculine and feminine characteristics. In his novel Adela Cathcart (1864), the curate preaches a sermon within which he exclaims:

> Brothers, sisters! do I not know your hearts from my own? - sick hearts, which nothing can restore to health and joy but the presence of Him who is Father and Mother both in one."[37]

And in his essay "A Sketch of Human Development"(1880), he says:

> There is no type so near the highest idea of relation to God, as that of the child to his mother. Her face is God, her bosom Nature, her arms are Providence - all love - one love - to him an undivided bliss.[38]

In his fairy stories the person who helps the protaganist in marvelous ways is almost always a woman. For example in "The Pincess and the Goblin"(1872) and "The Princess and Curdie"(1883), the mysterious, old yet beautifully young, guide and miraculous helper is portrayed as the Princess's "great grandmother". And in the fantasy novel Phantastes (1858) the

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[36] George MacDonald. The Disciple and Other Poems, (London: Strahan and Co. Publishers, 1867) p. 49.

[37] George MacDonald. Adela Cathcart, London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, 1864) vol.2, p.76.

[38] George MacDonald. "A Sketch of Individual Development", published in The Imagination: Its Function and Its Culture, William Shakespeare and othe Essays, previously published as Orts, enlarged ed. (London: Sampson Low Marston and Company, no date of publication given) p. 44.

protagonist is comforted through his moral struggles by an old woman in a cottage with eyes full of eternal youth and love.

His Mother

Although she died when he was only eight, something must be said about the influence of MacDonald's mother upon him. For it is often the deprivation of some things which have the greatest effect upon us. There is very little known specifically about her relationship to her children other than that she loved them dearly, and this itself speaks of the impact that her loss must have had.

Among the family mementoes which Greville MacDonald found in a "secret nest of drawers" of his father's, was a letter written by his [George's] mother to her mother-in-law which tells of her heartbreak at her inability to continue nursing the infant George due to her poor health:

> ....But I cannot help my heart being very much grieved for him yet, for he has not forgot it: poor little fellow he is behaving wonderfully well as yet. He cried desperate a while the first night, but he has cried very little since and I hope the worst is over now....[39]

The letter lay with some of his most personal possessions: "with a golden brown lock of that mother's hair and her wedding gift to her husband, a little silver-set seal with his name "George" engraved on its red stone; together also with little

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[39] Greville MacDonald. George MacDonald and His Wife, opus cit., p. 32.

trifles belonging to those of his own children who had followed her to the grave."[40] along with some verses written in his mother's own hand which were folded within the letter. Robert Lee Wolff, who did a Freudian study on MacDonald's fiction reads something pathological into the treasuring of these mementoes[41], however, it seems much more likely that he kept it from a two-fold purpose: (1) A remembrance in which his dead mother speaks lovingly of him and (2) as a symbol which embodies his deep longing for God -"Homeliness and heaven"[42] as he sometimes put it. I think the quote from "Human Development" given above bears this out.

Perhaps another influence which his vague but loving memories of his mother contributed to was his exalted view of women. She

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[40] Ibid. p. 33.

[41] Robert Lee Wolff. A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961). MacDonald's work offers many difficulties to those who analyse it from a perspective of sexual love alone. For he often intermixes time and eternity --the intimate love we shall all have for one another in the Heavenly Kingdom being foreshadowed here and now by pure relationships of all sorts, which, outside of fiction would be difficult to sustain. For example, the relationship of the Christ-like Mary with another woman in the novel Mary Marston could easily be misconstrued for a lesbian relationship; or the tutor's care and kindness for his pupil in David Elginbrod, where he gets into bed with him when he has a bad dream, could again be misconstrued for something which MacDonald certainly did not mean. In the fantasy novels this can become even more complex. For example in the novel Phantastes, the protagonist comes face to face with a beautiful young woman and is deeply attracted to her. She says to him "A man must not fall in love with his grandmother, you know"(ch. 1). She turns out to be his great-great-grandmother. MacDonald was always searching to discover and express answers to the needs and longings of the human heart within the mystery of time and eternity, but such searchings and expressions could be very easily misinterpreted outside of MacDonald's own perspective.

[42] David Elginbrod. opus cit., p. 408.

died before he could really perceive any defects. In his novel Phantastes, he tells of a planet where the men have arms, but the women have wings -"Resplendent wings are they, wherein they can shroud themselves from head to foot in a panoply of glistening glory."[43] He seems to give them here a special innocence. He also sees them as mediating help and divine influence upon men. Already mentioned are the helpers in his fantasy stories. There is also the Christianizing effect they have on men in the realistic novels,[44] mediating divine influences to men.

His imagination seemed to take over where memory left off concerning women and their blessings upon men. This seems expressed in his novel Castle Warlock with regard to the young protagonist whose mother, having died when he was five, whenever asked by his father to relate what memories he had of her, the father would continue listening when his son fell silent "as if he hoped and watched for some fresh revelation from the lips of the lad -as if, truth being one, memory might go on recalling,

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[43] George MacDonald. Phantastes, opus cit., p.79.

[44] For example, the effects of Amy Amber on Cornelius in Weighed and Wanting; or Lucy Burton on Thomas Worboise in Guild Court, of which MacDonald says:

> Above all, the love of woman, next to the love of God, is the power of God to a young man's salvation; for all is of God, everything, from first to last -nature, providence, and grace- it is all of our Father in Heaven...(Guild Court (1868), Whitehorn California: Johannesen Publishers, 1992 reprint of 1886 edition by Routledge and Sons, New York, p. 189)

as imagination goes on foreseeing"[45] with a trust that imagination divines in an intuitive way the truth. A man with such an imaginitive gift as MacDonald's, we feel, could not but be influenced by the loss of his mother in such a way that that loss provided a touchstone to, and a rich ferment for, an intuitive insight into the human heart's longing for the tender Mother-love of the heart of God.

The Influence of Romanticism

MacDonald was not only influenced by, but indeed was himself a part of the Romantic Movement. The Romantics felt that the scientific or empirical method of the Enlightenment had left a void or deprivation in regard to Man's relation with Nature. They had set it apart for analysis and hence had lost a vital communion with it[46]. Schiller's poem "The Gods of Greece" expresses this well:

> Unconscious of the joys she dispenses,
> Never enraptured by her own magnificence,
> Never aware of the spirit who guides her,

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[45] George MacDonald. Castle Warlock (1882), (Whitehorn, California: Johannesen Publishers, 1991 reprint of 1890 4th ed. by Keegan, Paul, trench & Trubner, London) p. 17.

[46] MacDonald complains of this in an "Essay on Wordsworth's Poetry" (Orts: Essays by George MacDonald. London: Sampson, Law, Marston, Scarlet and Riverton, 1882):

> We are not satisfied that the world should be a proof and varying indication of the intellect of God. That was how Paley viewed it. He taught us to believe there is a God from the mechanism of the world. But allowing all the argument to be quite correct, what does it prove? A mechanical God and nothing more. (p. 246).

Never more blessed through her blessedness,
Insensible of her maker's glory
Like the dead stroke of a pendulum,
She slavishly obeys the law of gravity,
A nature shorn of the divine.[47]

Coleridge, who influenced MacDonald concerning both the imagination and the importance of the role of the poet, had taken up this theme on a philosophical level. He argued that Kant's "metaphysics of experience" was a reduction of experience as he knew it, and felt that Kant would deny mankind the very possibility of being able to bring unity, and hence meaning, to the world around them. To Coleridge "the root and ground of philosophy was a unifying vision of the whole and he ascribed this vision to imagination"[48]. Raeper says of Coleridge that:

> [his] message was that poets were prophets, divine metaphysicians who mediated revelation to mankind, and this was done through symbolic writing which pointed up the relation of man to the supernatural through nature. Coleridge affirmed that there was a transcendental element in nature which found a living response in the heart of every man whether he was a

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[47] Quoted from George S. Hendry. The Theology of Nature (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) p. 22.

A poem by Wordsworth expresses similar sentiments:

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:-
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and Art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

("The Tables Turned", vss. 25-32) William Wordsworth. The Works of William Wordsworth (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1994) pp. 481-482.

[48] Hendry. The Theology of Nature, opus cit., p. 87.

believer or not.[49]

Nature and Childhood

Similarly, Wordsworth embodies, and certainly typifies in his poetry better than anyone else, this vital communion that mankind ought to have with nature; and points out several of her "communications". Among them are the peak transcendental experiences which form loci for such other experiences as psychological and spiritual healing, moral improvement ("vivifying virtue"), and an ineffable knowledge of God permeating all of creation[50]. MacDonald names him a "Christian Pantheist" and explains the term as meaning:

> this belief that God is in everything, and showing himself in everything .... [the] truth shining through beauty ...comes to our souls as a power of life...meant to be seen and felt by us ...as the flowing forth of his heart, the flowing forth of his love for us, making us blessed in the union of his

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[49] William Raeper. George MacDonald, opus cit., p. 238.

[50] In a book by Michael Pafford entitled Inglorious Wordsworth, where he makes a study of the phenomenon of transcendental experiences among teenagers, he finds that 55 percent of his respondents said they had had such experiences. He also refers to many examples from British autobiographical literature to support his thesis where they attest that transcendental experiences of nature had been central to their life's development. He also notes that just a glance through the seven thousand titles in William Matthew's list of British autobiographies yields many which use a Wordworth quotation as the title of their autobiography or memoir and many more which have a section or chapter entitled with a quotation from Wordsworth that seeks to articulate a childhood experience.(cf. p. 50ff.) As far as whether the experiences were perceived of as being of a religious or of an aesthetic nature, Pafford (following what Wm. James called "overbelief") thinks that that depends upon "the ideas, beliefs, and preconceptions that he [the person] brings to the experience". (p. 25) However, the experiences themselves coming from Nature are without question.

heart and ours.[51]

For example, Wordsworth writes:

> These beauteous forms...I have owed them,
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
> And passing ever into my purer mind,
> With tranquil restoration....
> And I have felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy
> of elevated thoughts;
> A sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,[52]

> Let Nature be your Teacher
> She has a world of ready wealth,
> Our minds and hearts to bless-
> Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
> Truth breathed by cheerfulness.
> One impulse from a vernal wood
> may teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can.[53]

Such effects are expressed in MacDonald's novel Wilfred Cumbermead (1872), where the young protagonist, while in Switzerland, has a "vision" of Nature (the Jung frau seen unexpectedly) which impacts him with awe and has a lasting effect upon him for the good:

> I sunk to my knees in the boat and gazed up....from the mind it glorified it has never vanished. I have been more ever since. To have beheld a truth is an apotheosis. What the truth was I could not tell; but I had seen something which raised me above my former self and made me long to rise higher yet. It awoke

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[51] George MacDonald. "Essay on Wordsworth's Poetry" in Orts, opus cit., p.247.

[52] William Wordsworth. From poem XXVI entitled "LINES, Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey" (July 13, 1798; vss. 20-30; 93-97) from Poems of the Imagination, in The Works of William Wordworth (Ware, Herfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1994) pp. 206-207.

[53] From the poem "The Tables Turned" (1798, vss. 16-24), ibid., p.481.

worship, and a belief in the incomprehensive divine;
but admitted of being analysed no further.[54]

In order to experience communion with Nature and the God of that Nature, Nature must be approached with a sense of wonder, not utility. This sense of wonder was seen by the Romantics to be especially keen in children, but as one grew older his/her interaction and involvement in worldly affairs slowly deadened the person's perception. This belief was also influenced by notions from Platonic philosophy, whereby the soul was thought to have an immediate vision of the "ideas" -truth, beauty, goodness, unity- before being incarnated, and hence would carry a strong remembrance of them when young. A poem by Wordworth expresses this:

Our birth is but a dream and a forgetting...
But trailing clouds of glory do we come from God,
Who is our home.[55]

MacDonald was not only in agreement with Wordsworth as to the freshness which childhood brought to the encounter with Nature but he further proposes that exposure to nature has a child-making effect upon Man. For example, in his novel Guild Court (1868), one of the leading characters is a young girl (Mattie) who has grown up within the confines of her little neighborhood (Guild Court) in London. She is a peculiar girl in the sense that she is one of those people who seems to have been born old.

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[54] George MacDonald. Wilfred Cumbermeade (London: Hurst and Blackett Publishers, 1872) vol. 1, pp. 244-245.

[55] The Works of William Wordsworth, opus cit., from the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Reflections of Early Childhood", vss. 58, 64-65. p.588.

MacDonald describes her as:

> a child of eight, but very small for her age. Her hair was neatly parted and brushed on each side of a large, smooth forehead, projecting over quiet eyes of blue, made yet quieter by the shadow of those brows. The rest of her face was very diminutive. A soberness as of complete womanhood, tried and chastened, lay upon her. She looked as if she had pondered upon life and its goal, and had made up her little mind to meet its troubles with patience....When she spoke, she used only one side of her mouth for the purpose, and then the old-fashionedness of her look rose almost to the antique, so that you could have fancied her one of the time-belated "good people" that, leaving the green forest-rings, had wandered into the city and become a Christian at a hundred years of age.[56]

She has no sense of wonder and evaluates the world around her from a utilitarian point of view.

She has been invited out to the country for the first time in her life. They have arrived at night. Upon awaking in her new surroundings she is first struck with a view from her bedroom window of the sea and sky -such immensity as she had never been faced with before. MacDonald tells us that:

> She started back with a feeling she could never describe; there was terror, and loneliness, and helplessness in it....she needed...just such a sight as this to take the conceit out of her....Yes. The whole show of the universe was well spent to take an atom of the self out of the child....A sense of the infinite and the near, the far yet impending, rebuked the conceit of Mattie to the core, and without her knowing how or why.[57]

This begins for Mattie a new phase, or rather, enlargement of

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[56] George MacDonald. Guild Court (1868), (Whitehorn, California: Johannesen Pub. Co., 1992 reprint of 1886 edition by Routledge and Sons, New York) p. 33.

[57] Ibid. pp. 198-199.

her existence. This "rebuke of the conceit" or the humbling of her is needed to shake her out of herself and awaken her to a much larger existence than Guild Court and her own limited understanding of reality. This opening up is accompanied by fear, but, isn't the closure which pride results in also initiated by fear?[58] She begins to wonder about the meaning of the creation around her. She had previously disregarded such things as flowers, "because they wither and die", but now, through her experience, and the kindly instruction of her friend Lucy, she begins to look for the meaning in things she either took for granted or disparaged. God was now being unveiled for her, perhaps in ways she could not fully understand, yet, He was there as never before. MacDonald sums up the effects upon her of this encounter with Nature by the end of her vacation:

> Thus, by degrees, Mattie's thought and feeling were drawn outward....She grew younger and humbler....Here, God was ever before her in the living forms of his thought, a power and a blessing. Every wind that blew was his breath, and the type of his inner breathing upon the human soul. Every morning was filled with his light, and the type of the growing of that light which lighteth every man that comes into the world. And there are no natural types that do not dimly work their spiritual reality upon the open heart of a human being. Before she left Hastings, Mattie was almost a child.[59]

Nature had had an awakening and renewing effect bringing her closer to her origin --God, and to a recognition of him in

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[58] Fear is one of the great enemies to growth. We look at this in chapters three and four as isolating and stunting the growth of the individual; as well as being responsible for eliciting the delusional vices of pride and envy, and the sadness of sloth.

[59] Ibid. pp. 204-205.

creation all about her. This child-making effect also unites her more closely to him by way of likeness itself:

> For God is not only the Father of the child, but of the childhood that constitutes him a child, therefore childness is of the divine nature.[60]

For the Romantics, nature was an immanent expression of God (sometimes used in a very broad sense), full of life and power and refreshment, surrounding us and communing with us. This helped bridge the chasm which the utilitarian, scientific-usefulness-view of Nature which the spirit of the Enlightenment had created. But MacDonald was not satisfied with this degree of closeness. For him, God was the sustaining force within him as well as without; indeed, that was title of his first published work --Within and Without. Jacob Boehme's revelation prompted by the reflection on the pewter jug, of the sustaining underlying power of God's Spirit in all of creation is the type of closeness and intimacy which MacDonald seeks to convey. He would say that "God's life is deeper in us than our own" and hence we are ever, utterly in His care, "we are think being thought"; and this gave support and form to his idea of the Fatherhood of God.

F.D. Maurice and Universal Salvation

We will close this chapter with a look at MacDonald's coming to adopt the stance of Universal Salvation, that is, that all of God's rational creatures, human beings and angels alike, will one day be restored to His friendship and share eternal beatitude. In a letter from his father dated May 31st 1850, we

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[60] George MacDonald. The Hope of the Gospel (London: Ward, Lock, Bowden and Co., 1892) p. 56.

get a glimpse of what MacDonald's theological position was at the end of his studies at Highbury:

> ....Your letter yesturday gave me something of "variety" to think about which pleased me, notwithstanding that part of it was rather too philosophical for the cast of my mind; but insofar as I am able [to] see, the views of both of us are very much alike....Like you, I cannot by any means give in to the extreme points of Calvinism or Arminianism, nor can I bear to see that which is evidently gospel mystery torn to pieces by those who believe there is no mystery in the scriptures and therefore attempt to explain away what it is evidently the honour of God to conceal.[61]

The difficulties he had with the Church in Arundel offers more detail to his ideas at about this time. But when and why did he come to a belief in Universal Salvation? The "when?" probably stems from his meeting and becoming friends with F.D. Maurice. He met Maurice in 1855 through A.J. Scott as Maurice was one of Scott's circle of friends. Maurice was more of an historical theologian than MacDonald, however MacDonald's special gift was of an intuitive poetical mysticism. Maurice's explanation of the biblical term "eternal" in relation to "eternal life" and

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[61] Greville MacDonald. George MacDonald and His Wife, opus cit., p. 132. (In a nutshell, Arminianism refutes the traditional "five points" of Calvinism. Briefly stated: 1) Total depravity, 2) Unconditional election, 3) Limited atonement, 4) Irresistible grace to those elected, and 5) Perseverance. See the Westminster Confession for a detailed explanation of each. (The mnemonic TULIP is often used for easy recall).
Arminianism, on the other hand, rejects man's total depravity allowing him sufficient free will to repent and believe in Christ; identifies the "elect" as those whom God in His foreknowledge saw would repent and believe; they see Christ's atonement as being for all, however, Man's free cooperation is necessary for that atonement to be efficacious; that Man can resist the grace of the Holy Spirit if he chooses to; and that even true Christians can backslide into a state of unbelief and be damned.

"eternal death" was that it referred to the quality of life[62], rather than the duration per se. This was adopted by MacDonald and supported his intuitive poetic need to arrive at an harmonious unity in relation to how an all good, all knowing, all powerful, all loving God could create some creatures for eternal torment: be it directly by His will or his defeat by their "free will". This paradox was the "why?" of his accepting Universalism. It just didn't equate with his heart's understanding of love and of his experience of his own father. He would ask, how is the Gospel "good news" to those headed for such destruction; and, what loving all-powerful Father would do such a thing? He was well aware of the need for justice and the need for men and women to have a change of heart. But for him, the suffering involved in such conversion was always meant for correction and not for retribution. In this he was in agreement with some of the Eastern Fathers. Apokatastasis (restoration or reestablishment) was held by by many Eastern Church Fathers. Origen, for example believed that God would bring about the change of mind of all rational creatures while respecting their freedom (cf. On First Principles). Gregory of Nyssa hoped that God would save all rational creatures including the Devil and his angels. Where the Church has historically balked, is the holding of a doctrine of a "necessary" universal salvation. This

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[62] cf. "Theological Essays" (1853); Letters concerning his interpretation of the Athanasian Creed from The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice: Chiefly told in his own letters. ed. by Frederick Maurice, 2 vol. London: MacMillan and Co., 1884. Vol. 2, pp. 182-185, a letter dated October 4, 1853 from Archdeacon Hare to a Layman; 412-414, letter dated June 25, 1864 from F.D.Maurice to a young clergyman; 482-484,letter dated July 22, 1862 from F.D. Maurice to the Rev. A. Starkey.

was addressed during an Origenist controversy of the 5th and 6th centuries (along with the belief in the transmigration of souls), and was condemned by the Provincial Council of Constantinople (553).[63]

Whenever they used the term "hell", MacDonald and Maurice saw it as a description of a sinner's quality of life here and now; and, after death as similar to the Roman Catholic notion of purgatory. MacDonald couldn't hold for the Protestant view of an immediate act of God at death for the entrance of a person into the beatific vision since this did not respect God's own gift of free will to Man. For MacDonald, a person must freely come to will God's will, since God made the human being with free will. And Man only freely chooses that which he perceives as self-enriching. There must be a learning process to foster that perception and through a quasi-purgatorial learning after death each person comes to perceive God's will as self-enriching. Those that must continue to learn after death are still loved by God and not abandoned. In a poem entitled "Thanksgiving for F.D. Maurice", written upon his death in 1872, MacDonald writes:

> He taught that hell itself is yet within
> The confines of thy Kingdom; and its fires
> The endless conflict of thy love with sin,
> That even by horror works its pure desire.[64]

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[63] cf. The Christian Faith. ed. by Neuner & Dupuis, revised edition. London: Collins, 1983, p. 682.

[64] This stanza was omitted from the 1893 published version in Poetical Works. I quote it from George MacDonald and His Wife by Greville MacDonald, opus cit., p. 398.

And in the introduction to Letters from Hell, by Vladimer Thisted, MacDonald writes:

> I see no hope for many, no way for the divine love to reach them, save through a very ghastly hell. Men have got to repent; there is no other escape for them, and no escape from that.[65]

The need to repent is based on the need for moral goodness which can be likened to the hinge of a two way door. In order to know and love God and to commune with Him, there must be a "likeness" --the union through likeness, moral likeness, that the Eastern Father's taught; and to love our neighbour as Christ loved us, we must be filled with the goodness of benevolent love. We discuss these central issues below, especially in the Chapter IV on "MacDonald's Anthropology of the Christian Life".

Conclusion

MacDonald's unfailing trust in God as "loving Father" underpinned the whole of his theology. He sought to rescue the reputation of God from doctrines which caused the human heart to recoil and contract. Within the Father's love, he also understood the innate human need for justice, both in relation to God and to one's neighbour and this manifested itself in an interpretation of forgiveness which was a genuine reconciliation in which the inner attitudes which originally caused the breach were changed. The suffering or punishment, then, even the paying of the "last farthing" was a mercy to Man for it restored love. This Father-God permeated all things and especially communicated

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[65] Vladimer Thisted. Letters from Hell (London: Bentley and Son, 1886) Introduction, p. viii.

Himself through Nature, "natures beauty flowing forth from God's heart to our heart 'making us blessed in the union of His heart and ours'".

We have sought to give an overview and hope to develop some of the ideas here proposed in the following chapters in greater detail and with further implications. As a poet-theologian he sought to shed light upon and bring meaning and harmony to the often hidden and twisted strands of life within its Mystery . He develops theories from a life lived and reflected upon, rather than living by others' theories; and in this, he offers common ground with all of humanity and not just those who believe in God.

Chapter II

IMAGINATION, FANTASY AND THEOLOGY

Theological Imagination Mistrusted

In his Foreward to The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha George Macrae notes that in its battle to preserve orthodoxy the early Church excised from its canon those works which it perceived as tainted with heresy. He gives the example of how even the very references in the Book of Jude to the pseudepigraphical Book of 1 Enoch caused some of the Churches to only reluctantly accept it. And that in 2 Peter, where much of Jude is incorporated into its second chapter, all allusion to 1 Enoch is deleted.[1] Pseudepigrapha, however, is rich in what Macrae calls "creative religious imagination"[2], and hence its complete demise, rather than a prudent qualified acceptance, we feel, is a loss to religious culture.

The same dangers to orthodoxy by way of the imagination are noted by Bettenson in his preparatory material to the writings of Irenaeus[3] where he presents a whole lists of aberrations faced by the early Church: from those who read Scripture with a

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[1] The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, edited by J. Charlesworth, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), vol. 1, p. ix.

[2] Ibid. p. x.

[3] The Early Church Fathers, edited and translated by Henry Bettenson, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) pp. 61ff.

methodology of opposites (God then becomes the arch-enemy of man and the serpent his friend); to Gnosticism, whose danger and appeal are seated in the imagination of both the theologian and the hearer[4]. Burkett, whom Bettenson quotes, described this early period of Church history in the following terms:

> We are dealing...with the products of human fancy, a fanciful world "moulded to the heart's desire", in which the religious imagination was not tied down to historical facts preserved in an authoritative book. In these days I venture to think that we are not sufficiently grateful to the orthodox Catholic theologians who clung so doggedly to the literal truth of the Scriptures.[5]

The imagination, subsequently, has been held to be suspect in the area of Christian theology and religion, and even in the Old Testament[6], probably for similar reasons as given above (but with more emphasis in relation to the Jews contact with the religion of their neighbors and hence the danger of syncretism). Yet, in spite of all the dangers, the imagination is a fundamental part of the human psyche and is necessary to the individual in order to situate himself in his actual living situation. It is by way

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[4] By way of giving evidence that Gnosticism, at that time, was a very real threat to orthodox Christianity Bettenson cites the fact that Irenaeus' book, generally known as Adversus Hereses, actually bears the title of The Refutation of False Gnosis. Ibid. p.12.

[5] Church and Gnosis by Dr. Burkitt, quoted by Bettenson in The Early Church Fathers, opus cit., p.63.

[6] The three different Hebrew words which were translated by the Authorised Version as imagination (yetser, sheriruth, and machashebeth) are all used in a pejorative sense, and even though the RSV often uses other words or phrases for their translation (e.g. "a heart that devises wicked plans" Prov. 6:18), where it has retained "imagination", it is always in a negative sense. cf. McIntyre Faith Theology and Imagination, (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1987) p.5.

of the imagination that possible options and outcomes are offered to human action. It is also the imagination which seeks to unify the various strands of our life-history and help to make sense out of them and to discover the meaningfulness of one's own existence within human existence itself[7]. Therefore, to eradicate it entirely from theology and religion because of its possible dangers ends up being a loss to both the doing of theology, i.e., use of the imagination as a tool of the theologian, as well as an impoverishment to that area of human nature which cries out with all the longings of the human heart for the embodiment in intelligible forms of that vitality of the Christian life which bridges time and endures to eternity, and which sees, through a penetrating imaginative vision, the mundane world interpenetrated by the mystical or eternal.

We would also point out that not only is it an impoverishment to humanity, but that there is the real danger, and in fact it is an ever-growing reality, of men and women turning to various forms of alternative religion and superstition ("New Age", Astrology, White Witchcraft, etc.) to fill the void of the imaginative necessity to face the mysteries and uncertainties of human existence.

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[7] Cf. Sartre, The Psychology of the Imagination and also McIntyre's analysis of it in Faith Theology and Imagination, opus cit., pp.119ff.; cf. also The Sources of Self by Charles Taylor (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1989) where he argues that modern man is ignoring a non-quantifiable aspect of his personality which must be articulated in order to give a framework for meaningful expressions about life. "We find the sense of life through articulating it....Discovering here depends on, is interwoven with, inventing."(p. 18).

The need to rely more heavily on the imagination to do full justice to the Christian message and to rescue the imagination for theology has been addressed by John McIntyre in a recent book.[8] In it he makes a case for the use of imagination as a tool for theology by defending its validity. He points out that it was precisely through parabolic imaginative stories that our Lord did much of his teaching on the Kingdom[9]. And, that as an epistemological tool Scriptural images speak not in a merely analogical way about God, "but that the positive content in their analogy is sufficiently high to justify our claim that in knowing God thus in terms of the images or models, we have genuine knowledge and are not being deceived .... even, some suggest, the most effective and accurate knowledge possible for us".[10]

He tells us that the starting point in his interest in the relationship between theology and imagination began through a work by George MacDonald.[11] And that MacDonald gives a true picture of the important and all encompassing role that imagination plays in human life. McIntyre, however, does not

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[8] John McIntyre. Faith Theology and Imagination, (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1987).

[9] Ibid. Chapter 2.

[10] Ibid. p. 169.

[11] An essay entitled "The Imagination: Its Functions and Culture"(1867), Published in his collection of essays called A Dish of Orts.

discuss MacDonald's works (as that is not the scope of his book) but does point to some of the relationships MacDonald draws between imagination and faith, religion, and God:

> ...MacDonald has not tied it [the imagination] to some esoteric fringe of the subject [theology]. He has linked it to the great central doctines of creation, the Bible, the Spirit of God, the story of Jesus, the *imago Dei,* human goodness and personal piety, and the training of the young.[12]

In the actual doing of theology, MacDonald goes even a step further than McIntyre's observation. Not only does MacDonald introduce imagination into the already established branches of theology, but he uses the imagination to produce fantasy works in a manner which is best described as "mythopoeic"[13] - articulating and shedding new and deeper understandings on what it means to be a human being in-relation-to the transcendent. And precisely because they are of the fantasy genre, they are liberated from all ties with religion and creed and hence speak to the reader in a way which is free from any bias or religious prejudice which s/he might bring to a theological or religious text.

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[12] McIntyre, Faith Theology and Imagination, opus cit., p. 18.

[13] It was C. S. Lewis who coined this expression in reference to MacDonald, i.e. that he possessed a mythopoeic gift, in his preface to George MacDonald: An Anthology. See the section "The Mythopoeic Gift," below, for a definition of the term.

The Imagination and Fantasy Literature

Fantasy literature, succinctly defined is "fiction involving the supernatural"[14]; and, as Colin Manlove points out, it did not come into its own "as a self-aware genre...until after 1965 and the 'discovery of Tolkien' by the United States"[15]. Our contemporary understanding of it, with its esteem for the imagination, springs from sources in the early nineteenth century. Previous to this the imagination, though not carrying the pejorative biblical and religious connotations, was not considered a reliable source for presenting truth. Aristotle, for example, in his de anima sees it as having an epistemological function somewhere between perception and intellect, but without either's certainty[16]. He also links it to "desire" in that it presents desirable things to the intellect and hence elicits movement, but it may not be presenting things as they actually are.[17] In his de memoria, he speaks of imagination in connection with the memory. It brings forth in

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[14] Colin Manlove. Scottish Fantasy Literature: A Critical Survey, (Edinburgh: Canongate Academic, 1994) from the Introduction, p. 1.

[15] Ibid.

[16] "perceptions are always true [he qualifies this in another place making exception for certain incidentals, e.g., he says you can often be sure you are seeing a white object, however, what the object is at that moment you may not know], while imaginings are for the most part false....Nor again will imagination be any of those things which are always correct, e.g. knowledge or intellect;" Aristotle. De Anima, trans. by D.W. Hamlyn (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1993) p. 54 428a10,16.

[17] "Because imaginations persist and are similar to perceptions, animals do many things in accordance with them..." Ibid. p.56 428b34. But they may not be accurate representations.

images those things stored in the memory and like the memory is liable to be in error.[18] It does not have a prominent place in the mind's functioning other than presenting in images things from the memory for the mind to use, however, Aristotle does not deny that such images are integral to thought:

> surely neither these nor any other thoughts will be images, but they will not exist without images.[19]

Aristotle's general appraisal, however, is not positive. It is only in the eighteenth century, with the work of Kant that an appreciation of the imagination's functions begins to take a positive shape.

In the Critique of Pure Reason Kant posits that the imagination is responsible for the free combination of things found in the memory rather than a mechanism for simply fetching them forth in image form. Yet, although this was an advance, he still limits it to a sensible schematization of the understanding's functioning. It is really Coleridge, in response to Kant's understanding of imagination, but within a criticism of Kant's "Copernican revolution", whereby the senses are seen as translating our environment into intelligible forms, rather than presenting the already intelligible forms of a unified environment and existence to us. This inability to really know the things around us which Kant suggested was contested by Coleridge on the grounds that this was not his experience of

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[18] Aristotle. de memoria, 450a22.

[19] Aristotle. de anima, opus cit. p. 66 432a12.

reality; and it was Coleridge's recognition of the imagination as having a primary role in this ability to unify and make sense out of the "whole" from the perceived parts by a creative process that gave the imagination its nineteenth century definition.

In his book Victorian Fantasy, Stephen Prickett begins his period study of fantasy by examining how the changing meaning of the word "fantasy" and certain terms associated with it, viz., "imagination" and "fancy", came to be used in the nineteenth century. With regard to "fantasy" he explains that previous to the nineteenth century:

> From its earliest usages in English the word has been associated with two other related ones, "imagination" and "fancy" -which shares the same Greek root as "fantasy". Chaucer uses both "imagination" and "fantasy" to mean "a mental image", in particular, "an image of something that does not exist".... Fantasy might be horrible, it might be delightful, but it was definitely unreal, and therefore of little more than clinical interest to sane and practical citizens.[20]

Under the influence of Romanticism, however, fantasy stories took on new interest and in them was discovered "a source of spiritual "dynamism"[21] which the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on quantifiable substances, had deliberately neglected and denigrated. With this "discovery" came new and explicit meanings for imagination, fancy and fantasy.

Coleridge defined imagination as:

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[20] Stephen Prickett. Victorian Fantasy (Bloomington Indiana and London: Indiana University Press, 1979) p. 1.

[21] Ibid. p.5.

> [a] living power....a repitition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM"[22]

To the term "fancy" was relegated the antecedent usage and thus was defined by Coleridge as:

> A mere dead arrangement of fixities and definites: a scissors-and-paste job of the mind.[23]

The term "fantasy", at this time, had come to mean the image-making power which dreams and reverie are made up of, but without the aesthetic and creative power of imagination.[24] It was only when these fantasies were imbued with creative imaginitive power that they became vehicles whereby eternal ideas became visible. Through the power of imagination, fantasy created poetic symbols which not only represented invisible realities but also brought the reader into contact with these realities. Both Coleridge and Carlyle define such symbols in this way:

> Coleridge in The Statesman's Manual, had defined "symbol" in terms of "the transluscence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal", partaking of "the Reality which it renders intelligible".[25]
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> In Symbol there is a concealment and yet a revelation....In the Symbol...there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, and as it were, to stand

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[22] Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross, Oxford 1907 vol. 1. quoted from Stephen Prickett, Victorian Fantasy, opus cit., p.6.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid. pp. 6-7.

[25] Ibid. p. 7. Prickett's citation of Coleridge is given as Lay Sermons, ed. R.J. White, Routledge, 1972, pp. 28-30.

visible and attainable there...[26]

George MacDonald's understanding of these fantasy terms was largely influenced by both Coleridge and Carlyle, as well as some German authors. They helped to confirm him in his own understandings of the value of poetic insight and the power of the imagination. In an 1867 essay entitled "The Imagination: Its Function and Culture" (which McIntyre refers to above) he writes:

> The imagination is that faculty ....in man which is likest to the prime operation of the power of God, and has, therefore, been called the creative faculty, and its exercise creation.[27]

Imagination's source

After extolling imagination's power, he then links its operation invariably to God's inspiration on the level of the unconscious mind:

> a man is rather being thought than thinking, when a new thought arises in his mind.[28]

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[26] The Collected Works of Thomas Carlyle, Chapman and Hall, 1870, Vol. i, Book III, Ch. 3, pp.212-215, quoted from Stephen Prickett's Victorian Fantasy, opus cit., p. 7.

[27] George MacDonald. "The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture", first published in the "British Quarterly Review" (n. 964, July 1867) and later reprinted in Orts (1893). I am using an enlarged edition published under the title of The Imagination: Its Function and its Culture, William Shakespeare and other Essays by the Late George MacDonald, L.L.D. (London: Sampson Low Marston & Company, no date) p. 2.

Similarly, in Diary of An Old Soul (1880), he says of the imagination that it is the "Mirror of God's creating mirror". (verse for August 27).

[28] Ibid. p. 4.

He says that it is God who dwells in Man's unconscious part who is enlightening him. He bases this on both his Faith (which sees an ever-caring indwelling of God in Man and an irrevocable destiny of union between them) and his personal understanding that such insights are experienced as "given" to Man:

> can we not say that they [new insights] are the creation of the unconscious portion of his nature? Yes, provided we can understand that that which is the individual, the man, can know, and not know that it knows, can create and yet be ignorant that virtue has gone out of it. From that unknown region we grant they come, but not by its own blind working. Nor, even were it so, could any amount of such production, where no will was concerned, be dignified with the name creation. But God sits in that chamber of our being in which the candle of our consciousness goes out in darkness, and sends forth from thence wonderful gifts into the light of that understanding which is His candle.[29]

If, then, all new ideas come from God, is the chief function of the imagination creative? To this question MacDonald reasons as follows. He first looks at the etymology of the word "poet"[30].

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[29] Ibid. pp. 24-25.

[30] MacDonald is presupposing a 19th century definition of a poet as a man of genius. This was not the understanding of previous generations. C.S. Lewis, in his Studies in Words (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 2nd. ed. 1967), while discussing the changing meaning of the word "wit" in historical literary usage offers an example to demonstrate his point with the word "poet":

> Poet has in our time become a term of laudation rather than of description....[however, previously] Even when a man wrote verse, to call a man a poet implied neither that he had, not that he had not, what we now call "poetic genius"....Johnson, who defines "poetry" as "metrical composition" defines "poet" as "an inventor ; an author of fiction; a writer of poems; one who writes in measure."...[the term simply] told you what craft or profession he followed; like calling him an author. (pp. 94-95)

The Greek usage is *poietes,* "one who makes". Yet if God is always the one creatively making, even through human beings[31], is Man's making truly "creative"? MacDonald thinks not, and so he chooses a different etymology which he feels more appropriately conveys what a poet's imagination is "creating":

Conversely, for MacDonald, if a poet is a man of genius, then "poetry" is the language through which his insights come and how they are most aptly expressed. In his novel Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood (1867) the protagonist, Mr. Walton expresses these two views:

> My own conviction is, that the poetry is far the deepest in us, and that the prose is only broken-down poetry; and likewise that to this our lives correspond. The poetic region is the true one, and just, **therefore** that incredible one to the lower order of mind; for although every mind is capable of the truth, or rather capable of becoming capable of the truth, there may lie ages between its capacity and the truth. As you will hear some people read poetry so that no mortal could tell it was poetry, so do some people read their own lives and those of others. (Ch. 7. p. 92)

In the same novel, during a conversation between the protagonist, Mr Walton, and Mr. Stoddard, MacDonald sees poetry as the natural garment with which truth itself is clothed:

[W] "What is the immediate effect of anything poetic upon your mind?"

[S] "Pleasure," he answered....

[W] "But I should be very sorry to think, that to give pleasure was my object in saying poetic things in the pulpit. If I do so, it is because true things come to me in their natural garments of poetic forms. What you call the "poetic" is only the outer beauty that belongs to all inner or spiritual beauty -just as a lovely face- mind, I say "lovely", not "pretty", nor "handsome"- is the outward and visible presence of a lovely mind. Therefore, saying I cannot dissociate beauty from use [in my preaching], I am free to say as many poetic things ...as shall be of the highest use, namely, to embody and reveal the true." (Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood, London: Alexander Strahan Co., 1868)(ch. 9. pp. 152, 154)

[31] He gives examples of what he means, e.g., "would God give us a drama? He makes a Shakespeare". Orts opus cit., p. 4.

> From what we have now advanced, will it not then appear that, on the whole, the name given by our Norman ancestors is more fitting for the man who moves in these regions than the name given by the Greeks? Is not the "Poet", the "Maker", a less suitable name than the "Trouvere", the "Finder"?....it takes form already existing, and gathers them about a thought so much higher than they, that it can group and subordinate and harmonize them into a whole which shall represent, unveil that thought.[32]

He does not deny that, in relation to mankind, something new has been revealed, however, he sees this as a functioning of God's self-revelation to Man in such a way that he is ever discovering God's immanence, God's relationship to Man -the meaning of the whole made more and more clear through the extrapolation of the fragments.

The test of imagination

There is one more point with regard to the imagination we would like to highlight in MacDonald's thought, and that is the relationship of science to poetry. MacDonald sees the poet-scientist as the one necessarily proposing, by way of imaginative possibilities, the theories within a particular scientific discipline, and which must later be verified through quantifiable testing, with the result that new or modified theories can then be proposed.[33]

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[32] Ibid. pp. 19-20.

[33] He draws upon both Coleridge and Bacon to give weight to his argument:

> Coleridge says that no one but a poet will make any further great discoveries in mathematics: and Bacon says that "wonder", that faculty of the mind especially attendant on the child-like imagination, "is the seed of knowledge". (Ibid. p. 15)

He was likewise strict in applying imaginative theories of God's relationship to Man, in that they must, upon the test of living, yield verifiable results of human goodness, growth in Christ-likeness, happiness, wholeness and change of heart.

In an essay entitled "A Sketch of Individual Development" (1880) he describes how as a child we view the world in an imaginative poetic wholeness which bespeaks personal relationship with all of creation, which, however, is yet untried both to our own virtue (we often think ourselves to be better and stronger than we really are) and to the physical relation of things outside of us. He then comments that this beautiful picture and unity is painfully destroyed: with regard to our virtue, by the experience of our own weakness and selfishness; with regard to the physical world, through our study of science which initially kills or demythologizes the mysterious beauty and relational personification of the things around us, because, by knowing something of the mechanism of how they work, it initially blinds us to the very wonder of their existence.

Yet, MacDonald sees the mature person as learning and growing from these experiences of loss of the poetic, with the result of regaining them after a purification of the imagination from mere fancy has taken place. With regard to one's moral aspirations, this purification comes through learning by trial and error and eventually to live completely in the honesty of one's conscience: realising growth and freedom with the help of a

life-giving, love-revealing relationship with God as the way to the perfection which the imaginative vision both guides and calls.

With regard to science: MacDonald isn't explicit as to how it has served in the maturing process other than as a necessary passage by which faith is tested and proved. We would suggest that as a purifying process scientific knowledge serves to purify our perception of the physical world of superstition which might compete with and cloud our relationship to the one Father-God-Creator. Once we see beyond the mechanisms, and the blindness to wonder has been overcome, we regain again the mystery and beauty and Personal communication which fill and interpenetrate nature, even through "laws" which we can and naturally seek to grasp.

Briefly then, the imagination, as understood by MacDonald, was a power of creative discovery of God's relationship to us. It could cast a penetrating vision upon the mundane and see God's marvelous presence there as well as put into intelligible forms the often incommunicable experience of God. The imagination contained a power capable of leading to the heights of eternal meaning because it was informed by the eternal God with whom it ever communed in the hidden depths of the unconscious.

The Status of Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century

Fantasy distinguished from science fiction

With the tremendous growth of technology in the twentieth century there has been a similar growth in science fiction novels. And although these works are often "fantastic", they would not, however, be considered as belonging to the fantasy genre. They do sometimes contain traditional fantasy elements, and here they overlap with fantasy literature, but on the whole they do not. The protagonists in science fiction novels generally rely on new technologies to overcome their challenges, whereas in fantasy novels they generally rely on their own developing virtue and/or help from some supernatural or preternatural source which involves personal relationship with this source. This creates mystery and wonder. Colin Manlove points out the following differences between fantasy and science fiction:

> In fantasy we have the realization of wonder at created things rather than the desire to know in order to master....
>
> Fantasy tends to be moral in character, depicting the different nature of good and evil, and centrally concerned with viewing conduct in ethical terms. Science fiction is not so interested: certainly there can be "good" and "evil" personages in the genre, but the nature of their good or evil is not of great concern. In science fiction the criterion is often one of adaption, of adjustment to new situations for survival; in fantasy it is one of conduct, or how well or badly the characters behave by time-honoured

standards.[34]

With regard to the worlds in which the stories take place, Manlove would classify science fiction as taking place within this world or universe, and even other possible arrangements of this universe, and "usually concerned with the future and the way we may develop."[35] Fantasy, on the other hand, deals with a world enveloped by or participating in an invisible world or reality which carries with it an element of mystery which gives meaning to and direction to the lives and actions of the characters. Thus, it is only when science fiction deals simultaneously with an invisible reality interpenetrating the present reality, with its effects or consequences in personal transformation and moral growth, that it enters into the fantasy genre. Now that we have made this clarification we will look at the contemporary understanding of fantasy.

Twentieth century fantasy

The nineteenth century understandings of "fantasy", "imagination", "fancy", and "symbol" have remained with us into the twentieth century. In a recent essay "The Encounter With Fantasy", its author Gary Wolfe voices this contemporary understanding. In his essay he examines the factors which he

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[34] Colin Manlove. "On the Nature of Fantasy" (a reprint with amplification of his Introduction to Modern Literary Fantasy: Five Studies) an essay published in The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art ed. by Roger C. Schlobin (Copublished: Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press; and Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press Ltd., 1982) pp. 30-31.

[35] Ibid. p. 23.

perceives as making fantasy literature, with what he terms its "impossible quality", successful. His basic finding is that there must be underlying ideas which are meaningful to the reader; and then goes into examining the role of creative imagination in fantasy:

> Meaning is an essential factor in the irreality function of fantasy; it is what lends the fantasy something resembling what Clive Bell's "significant form" and what sustains our interest in the impossible long after our cognitive apprehension of impossibilities has passed, long after we have resolved the momentary hesitation or irresolution that Todorov calls "the fantastic".[36]

His understanding of the differences between "fancy" and "imagination" are much the same as those distinguished by Coleridge in the nineteenth century. Imagination is identified as the underlying creative force:

> [with] works of true imagination we can expect an ideational structure that goes far deeper than the controlling tone of the work, that is in fact based on what Manlove calls "deeper meaning".[37]

Similarly, with regard to what we saw as "symbol" for Coleridge

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[36] Gary K. Wolfe. "The Encounter with Fantasy", published in The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art, ed. R.C. Schlobin (copublished by Harvester Press Ltd.: Brighton; Univ. of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, Indiana, 1982) pp. 6-7.

Clive Bell was an art critic. In his book entitled Art (London: Chatto and Windus, 1914) he explains that "significant form" is the term he applies to that universal, yet individually unique, quality in visual art which elicits aesthetic emotion.

Wolfe's quotation from Todorov is given as: Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, trans. by Richard Howard, (Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975) p. 25.

[37] Ibid. p. 10. He gives the Manlove citation as follows: C.N. Manlove, Modern Fantasy: Five Studies,(Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975) p. 11.

and Carlyle (bringing the reader into actual contact with the transcendent reality which it symbolized), Wolfe agrees, seeing the union of cognitive ideas and emotional "affect" in fantasy as expressing rather than representing hidden realities. He tells us that he explicitly chooses the term "expresses" over "represents" because for the reader to find a deeper meaning and have "a belief" in what is presented, there must be a real contact with the fantasy world.

> This does not mean that fantasy is necessarily didactic or allegorical, but it does imply that at the center of these works of imagination (as opposed to fancy) there must be a core of what might best be called "belief"....belief in the fundamental reality that this world expresses.[38]

The question of "where?"

The question of "from where do these imaginative worlds come?" is another topic in twentieth century fantasy criticism. George Landow in an essay entitled "And the World Became Strange: Realms of Literary Fantasy" seeks to locate the alternative places that the realities of the fantasy world refer to. He suggests that there are only two possibilities:

> Essentially, there are two ways to claim that the world of everyday reality, the world of the realistic novel, is inadequate to human needs: the first is to claim that a higher world of religious or political ideas and ideals is more important, more relevant; while the second is to claim that the inner worlds of the human mind, its subjective experiences, have primary value.[39]

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[38] Ibid. pp. 10, 12.

[39] George P. Landow. "And the World Became Strange: Realms of Literary Fantasy", published in The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art, ed. by R. Schlobin, opus cit., p.127.

For Landow, the fantasy world would need to be situated in one or the other.[40] In either case, though, they would have to be recognizably relevant to experience of the real world or to others' subconscious experience, otherwise they would be incommunicable and meaningless to others, and in some cases, even self-destructive.[41]

Wolfe too, points out the importance of experiential relevancy when exploring the differing degrees of communicative meaning which one person's fantasy may have for another. He posits at one end of the spectrum the completely personal non-communicative fantasies of schizophrenic hallucination, and at the other end the deeply meaningful "fantasies" of myth and religion.[42] For him, fantasy literature falls somewhere in between these two poles. His assessment of the success which fantasy authors have had in achieving the "meaningfulness" approaching that of myth and religion shows that the gift of creative imagination is not a common commodity:

> Fantasies that successfully lead us all the way to this deeper belief are still rare, despite the

[40] This differs from MacDonald as we noted above, since MacDonald sees the unconscious as the very dwelling-place of God. So rather than there being two mutually exclusive possibilities for the source of a fantasy world, MacDonald has them fleshing out one another.

[41] cf. Neil Cornwell. The Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism, (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990) pp. 59-60.

[42] "The Encounter with Fantasy" in The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art, opus cit., pp. 2-3.

illustrious history of fantastic literature.[43]

He very importantly remarks, however, that fantasy provides an especially apt framework, in fact he says a necessary framework, for approaching certain deep realities:

> [fantasy literature] at best,...will lead us to further recognition that these surface impossibilities [of a fantastic ambience] constitute a necessary strategy for approaching some profound and intense reality.[44]

We would like to explore further these two ideas Wolfe emphasises and relate them to MacDonald's work: first, "the deeply meaningful fantasies of myth and religion" and secondly, his assertion that the fantasy ambience "constitute[s] a necessary strategy for approaching some profound and intense reality".

With regard to the first idea, we will try to show that "myth" and "religion or religious myth" provide a missing portion of the framework of reality which gives meaningfulness to one's existence and daily actions.

With regard to the ambience of fantasy, we will try to show that it is conducive to an eschatological symbolism which is commonly defined in the Christian tradition as mysticism, and is a vehicle through which the reader glimpses the perfection of creation which his heart longs for. This communicates a "secret"

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[43] Ibid. p.14.

[44] Ibid.

hope to the heart which bridges the incomprehensibleness of suffering and pain in this life.

Finally, the ambience of fantasy is a vehicle for putting into descriptive images the usually hidden interior moral state of the individual; and through these overt images, to make clear and to more readily convert him or her to the love of truth and goodness which are the means to attaining this personal beauty and the admission to these transformed worlds.

Myth: Relation to the True

For clarification, our focus here concerns not those myths of an etiological character (i.e. those which provide a story for prehistorical events or of events or rituals whose initial purpose have been forgotten), nor in the types which are akin to forklore, or even the modern "folklore" of the advertisement industry or politics. Our interest is in the type of myth which gives insights into the very meaning of what it means to be human: Man's relationship to the unknown and to society. Here are some definitions of "myth" of the kind which we are concerned with:

> Myths are dramatic stories that form a sacred charter either authorizing the continuance of ancient institutions, customs, rites and beliefs in the area

where they are current, or approving alterations.[45]

> The myth, whatever its nature, is always a precedent and an example, not only for man's actions (sacred and profane), but also as regards the condition in which his nature places him; a precedent, we may say, for the expressions of reality as a whole.[46]

> Myth may be defined as a form of symbolic thought in which intellect, imagination, and emotion combine to communicate a perceived truth. A myth is not, then, in the first instance a fanciful tale, but a symbolic or poetic expression of that which is incapable of direct statement.[47]

> The greatest mythical tales make a direct appeal to the unconscious; they work through intuition. Their power is the flash of insight that illuminates the narrowness of matter-of-fact explanation and compels the intellect to acknowledge the need for more adequate understanding. Myths possess an intensity of meaning that is akin to poetry.[48]

Myth, used in this sense of the word, is what Christian revelation means to the believer. It provides a context for living which gives meaning to life's mysteries amid the fragmentariness of human history and human destiny in relation to the heart's longings and intuitions. Von Balthasar asks:

> where must we look to discover, in the fragmentariness of our existence, a tendency towards wholeness? [49]

He sees the resurrected Christ as the stabilizing answer to the

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[45] Raphael Patai. Myth and Modern Man (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972) p. 2.

[46] Mircea Eliade. Patterns of Comparative Religion (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979) p. 410.

[47] Jack Finegan. Myth and Mystery (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993 imprint of 1989 1st ed.) p. 15.

[48] Arthur Cotterell. A Dictionary of World Mythology (Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 1.

[49] Hans Urs von Balthasar. Man in History: A Theological Study (London: Sheed and Ward, 1982), Foreword, p. x.

present human condition of instability:

> Only the Christian faith is able to fill the present with the future of eternity in such a way that the present is at the same time convicted of its emptiness and judged in it, instead of it being intensified idealistically to a false "moment of eternity". Yet, it shows this emptiness only because of the plenitude which is promised to it. The simultaneity of all this is possible only when Christ is risen and has given an eternal foundation to temporal life. Otherwise, the only way out of the fragmentariness of existence would be the flight into a temporal future, which is always overtaken and left behind by the knowledge of the heart.[50]

So important is the situating of our present actions in a larger framework of meaning, that without it a thoughtful person often ends up with psychological problems and even loses the will to live or to continue living.[51]

The cry for meaning

Rollo May, the American humanistic psychologist, in his book The Cry for Myth sees the loss of myths (of the type we have been describing) to be at the root of many of the problems in Western society. He says:

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[50] Ibid. p. 332.

[51] When the important task which myth carries out (i. e., answering the questions as to the meaning of our daily existence, placing within a meaningful context our daily actions) is not present, the person loses direction and questions whether the sufferings of life are worth the effort at all. Carl Jung wrote:

> Among all my patients in the second half of life -that is to say over thirty-five --there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life.

(Carl G. Jung. Modern Man in Search of a Soul, New York: Harvest Books, 1933, p. 229.)

> As a practising psychoanalyst I find that contemporary therapy is almost entirely concerned, when all is surveyed, with the problems of the individual's search for myth. The fact that Western society has all but lost its myths was the main reason for the birth and development of psychoanalysis in the first place. Freud and the divergent therapists made it clear that myths are the essential language in psychoanalysis.... Many of the problems of our society, including cults and drug addiction, can be traced to the lack of myths which will give us as individuals the inner security we need in order to live adequately in our day. The sharp increase in suicide among young people and the surprising increase in depression among people of all ages are due...to the confusion and the unavailability of adequate myths in modern society.[52] (my emphasis)

May describes myth in virtually the same terms as the other's we have quoted above. He sees them as a means of understanding or situating ourselves within the mystery of human existence in order to free us to act and to integrate those actions into a broader context. He brings a special contribution as a psychologist, in pointing out that part of the function of myth is the cathartic effect it has on the hearer by means of vicarious participation in the myth. That is, by identifying with the characters of the myth, our own inner fears, passions, ways of reacting to situations, dealing with our own evil desires, etc., are dealt with in a way which liberates us from self-condemning, crippling guilt; and this, by situating us within the framework of a humanity similarly afflicted yet moving forward; or in some cases, providing us with consequences of actions so vicariously felt, that through them we learn to avoid such actions in our own lives.

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[52] Rollo May. The Cry for Myth, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc. 1991; these quotations are taken from the British edition: London: Souvinir Press, 1993.) p. 9.

> A myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world. Myths are narrative patterns that give significance to our existence....Myth making is essential to gaining mental health....Myths are our self-interpretation of our inner selves in relation to the outside world....Every individual who needs to bring order and coherence into the streams of her or his sensations, emotions, and ideas entering consciousness from within and without is forced to do deliberately for what in previous ages had been done for him by family, custom, church, and state.[53]

One example he cites of this cathartic effect is through a stage performance of the story of Faust:

> They will feel the same quality of emotion, if not in the same degree, as Faustus felt on stage. Each will get an emotional and moral release; each will feel his own desires to sell his soul for magic and power, and his own punishment for such, as each of us sells our soul along with the bargain Faustus made....we experience catharsis by identifying with the performers on stage. Having made vicarious descent into the underworld the people in the audience felt purified....[having] watched Faustus dragged into the horrors of the serpents and adders, the burning and the other tortures of hell, [they] would not only feel scared; they would go away **relieved**. All of this inner activity is on a deeper level than morality. This underlying experience is the cathartic power of myth.[54]

In addition to the cathartic effect which some myths evoke, May also sees them having an integrative and healing effect on the individual. This because they bring forth from the unconscious "repressed...archaic urges, longings, dreads, and other psychic content" while at the same time offering or revealing **new** goals, **new** ethical insights and possibilities"[55]. This results in the subjects being, on the one hand, made conscious of motivating

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[53] Ibid. p. 15, 20, 21.

[54] Ibid. pp. 232-233.

[55] Ibid. p. 86.

forces hidden in his subconscious mind which then enables the person "to experience greater reality in the outside world"[56]; and on the other hand, by suggesting new possibilities for dealing with problematic and formerly repressed material, the person learns to work out the problem "on a higher level of integration"....[by opening to the subject] a greater meaning which was not present before".[57]

Criticism and clarification

While we agree with most of what May says, we would like to make two observations in reference to his treatment of myth. First, in the final section of his book called "Myths for Survival" and consisting of only one chapter "The Great Circle of Love", he identifies what he feels to be the myth of the late 20th Century, one which Sir Fred Hoyle proposed:

> Once a photograph of the earth, taken from the outside, is available...a new idea as powerful as any in history will be let loose.[58]

The meaning which he gives to this is that the world will be perceived as a whole such that:

> We find ourselves in a new world community; we cannot destroy the parts without destroying the whole. In this bright loveliness we know that we are truly

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[56] Ibid. p.87.

[57] Ibid. p.86. We address the need for meaning in greater depth below in the section "Religion and Psychology".

[58] Ibid. p.300. Here, May is giving this quotation of Hoyle from a 1948 statement which he cites from P.Hussell, The Global Brain (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1983), p.16.

sisters and brothers, at last in the same family.[59]

Although this is a noble idea, we feel May has, in this hope, over-estimated the power of myth in this particular sense. For, if this were the case we would already have a loving brother and sisterhood existing in families and small communities; which, in reality, is not the case. Indeed, the Biblical myth of Cain and Abel seems to better express the present situation of mankind.

Secondly, while May extends the power of myth to answer troubling transcendental human questions, he often seems to restrict its action solely to the horizontal plane, i.e., its power to free the individual and to shape human relationships in the here and now, but without its carrying the individual on to an explicit relationship to the transcendent which gives form to the person's very existence. In other words, there is very little reinforcement or deepening conviction in the myth as truth rather than a coping device; and as revelation of a vital relationship to the transcendent Power or ultimate Truth (personified or not). For May, they seem to sometimes be simply crutches to get us through existential difficulties and to promote meaningful relations with each other.

We do not wish to lessen the importance of these goals, however,

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[59] Ibid. p.302. May seems especially influenced by Alfred Adler who saw "presence", i.e., the being present to the other person, as the basis for healthy social interaction. Hence, once the people of every nation (for May national boundaries are artificial inventions of politicians) or rather, every person perceives himself as occupying the same home -the planet earth- then true brotherhood will begin to reign.

if these "crutches" do not, through existential experience, convince the person as to their truth-value, will not the believer in myth always be falling into doubt? Will s/he not feel more and more deeply betrayed by the belief the more life deals harshly with him/her and become cynical and embittered? Therefore, we would be critical of May for neglecting this important ongoing relationship to the transcendent that myth bespeaks.

The need for existential reinforcement

In Tolstoy's Novel Anna Karenina there is represented an approach to the problem of life's meaning which we feel adds a necessary qualification to May's ideas on myth. In the character Levin, we find a man in his thirties, quite honest and caring, but of little religious conviction. He owns property and has a wife whom he loves. Yet, he is so plagued and consumed by the question of whether there is any meaning to life or whether it is the jest of some cruel power that:

> Levin, a happy father and husband, in perfect health, was several times so near suicide that he had to hide a rope lest he be tempted to hang himself, and would not go out with a gun for fear of shooting himself.[60]

Tolstoy's presentation of this gnawing human need seems precisely to stem from what May feels is at the heart of Western society -no myth to answer the question. Tolstoy, however, seeks

[60] Leo Tolstoy. Anna Karenin, translated by Rosemary Edmunds, (Great Britain: Penguin Classics, this edition 1988), part 8, chap. 9, p. 823.

a different solution, one which we feel May doesn't give sufficient attention to, i.e., he doesn't seem to tie it closely enough to the transcendent reality in Man.

Returning to Tolstoy's novel, the solution is one so obvious that it had eluded Levin. It is based in human nature itself, one which Levin eventually perceives without the mediation of myth. After having read a multitude of philosophers without any relief to his question about life's meaning, Tolstoy tells us:

> When Levin puzzled over what he was and what he was living for, he could find no answer and fell into despair; but when he left off worrying about the problem of his existence he seemed to know both what he was and for what he was living....[when making ethical decisions in the running of the farm and the treatment of his workers]. Deliberation led to doubts and prevented him from seeing what he ought to do and ought not to do. But when he did not think, but just lived, he never ceased to be aware of the presence in his soul of an infallible judge who decided which of two possible courses of action was the better and which the worse, and instantly let him know if he did what he should not.[61]

Finally, in a discussion with a simple peasant about two other peasants, "one who lives for his belly" and the other who "lives for God" and their associated behaviour toward others, Levin gains a flash of insight which brings harmony to the various dissonant notes in his life:

> The peasant's words had the effect of an electric spark, suddenly transforming and welding into one a whole series of disjointed, impotent, separate ideas that had never ceased to occupy his mind...."I have discovered nothing. I have simply opened my eyes to what I knew. I have come to the recognition of that Power that not only in the past gave me life but now

[61] Ibid. part 8, chap. 10, pp. 824, 826.

too gives me life."[62]

This discovery became for him an overwhelming proof of God's vital relationship to Man and life's meaning already rooted in the transcendent aspect of the soul.

> "Where did I get it from? Would reason ever have proved to me that I must love my neighbor instead of strangling him? I was told that in my childhood, and believed it gladly, for they told me what was already in my soul".[63]

Living according to these principles bespeaks, for Levin, a new context, and puts him in a living relation to "that Power" who created him and continues to give him life, and this is confirmed for him by the quality of life in the very living of it.

Our understanding of myth, then, is that it helps individuals and societies to establish a "vital relationship to the true and eternal" in such a way that one's life takes on and is permeated with new and deeper meaning.

With these understandings of imagination, fantasy, and myth established, we will now move on to MacDonald's use of them as creative tools for theological insight.

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[62] Ibid. pp. 829, 831.

[63] Ibid. p.832.

MacDonald and The Mythopoeic Gift

By "mythopoeic gift", we mean the ability to fashion stories which convey to the reader the same power which myths carry: namely, to speak to the person about the mysteries of human existence: where we come from, the meaning of suffering, how to find true happiness, what becomes of us after death, etc., in a way which resonates within the person's inmost being, defining for him/her the often inarticulable expressions of these mysteries and thus revealing and helping them to discover within their life meaning, meaning which influences them in their present actions, by providing them with an eternal context within which to situate these actions, the happenings of life, sufferings, etc.; and it does so with power, and this precisely because this new context is recognized as already inchoately hidden within their psyche.

Two literary critics applied the term "mythopoeic" to MacDonald, C.S. Lewis and W.H. Auden. C.S. Lewis in an essay prefacing his publication of an anthology of excerpts from MacDonalds works wrote:

> Most myths were made in prehistoric times, and, I suppose, not consciously made by individuals at all. But every now and then there occurs in the modern world a genius -a Kafka or a Novalis- who can make such a story. MacDonald is the greatest genius of this kind I know....What he does best is fantasy -fantasy that hovers between the allegorical and the mythopoeic....it [this type of art] produces works which give us (at first meeting) as much delight and (on prolonged acquaintance) as much wisdom and strength as the works of the greatest poets...It gets under our skin, hits us at a level deeper than our thoughts or even our passions, troubles oldest

> certainties till all questions are reopened, and in general shocks us more fully awake than we are for most of our lives.[64]

W.H. Auden in his introduction to a 1954 publication of MacDonald's chief Fantasy novels Phantastes and Lilith wrote:

> George MacDonald is pre-eminently a mythopoeic writer....In his power...to project his inner life into images, events, beings, landscapes which are valid for all, he is one of the most remarkable writers of the nineteenth century.[65]

MacDonald's ability "to project his inner life into images...etc." produces an evocative effect on the reader which captivates and moves him/her to enter into the scene by mysteriously giving him access to his own subconscious, transmitting and evoking feelings and emotions. The reader finds that s/he is acted upon in the same way as the particular character in the fantasy.

Imagery of The Kingdom

The call to conversion in preparation for the Kingdom of God (or the Kingdom of Heaven as it is variously called) occupies a good deal of the Gospel message. Conversion-metanoia, that is, the turning of the heart and mind from evil and the doing of good doesn't generally pose too much difficulty as far as description (John the Baptist gave such practical advice); Nor does putting

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[64] C.S. Lewis. George MacDonlad: An Anthology, (London and New York: MacMillan, 1947) pp. xxvii-xxx.

[65] W.H. Auden. "Introduction" to The Visionary Novels of George MacDonald, edited by Anne Fremantle, (Noonday Press, 1954) pp. v.

evil and horror into images seem to pose much difficulties for writers (especially the psychologically disturbed). However, putting into words and images the Kingdom of God is another matter. Jesus offers various images: a treasure hidden in a field, a pearl of great price, a dragnet's catch which is sorted, etc.(cf. Mt. 13 for these and others). We are all familiar with them. Most of them simply point to the need for conversion to attain the Kingdom, since the good will be separated out from the evil, or of the surpassing value of that Kingdom. There is, however, very little description of that Kingdom, and this most likely because it is beyond description in human terms. St Paul tells us "eye has not seen nor ear heard nor has it even entered into the mind of man the things God has prepared for those who love Him". It is, perhaps, only in the last two chapters of the Apocalyse[66] that we get some description of this Kingdom -beautiful images, emotional healing, and intimate relationship with God:

> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away"....Then came one of the seven angels ...and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb ...the holy city Jerusalem [the glorified menbers of the Church]...having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel... The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold,

[66] In the Old Testament we do find various images of the "Day of the Lord" in the Prophets but usually of frightful nature. The glory of Israel is, however, glimpsed in brief passages, e.g., Is. 11.

> clear as glass....Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations...(Apoc. 21:2-4, 9-11, 18, 22:1-2 RSV)

One of MacDonald's greatest gifts is this ability to put into images things which the human heart longs for. His writing evokes an imagery which breaks down the barriers between the different senses, or rather is able to merge them and to express in one of the senses that which is normally limited to another, giving an intensity of expression that captivates the reader[67] For example, in Phantastes (1858) when the protagonist, Anodos, is addressed by a tiny woman of fairy blood, he says that she spoke "in a voice that strangely recalled a sensation of twilight, and reedy riverbanks, and a low wind..."[68]. Likewise in his realistic novel Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood (1867), when asked by his teacher to read a sonnet by Wordsworth the student [Tom], although not able to understand the sonnet expresses himself in a way which is recognized by his teacher as coming

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[67] Experimental Psychology has recognized or acknowledged that in some people there is an overlap, so to speak, between one sense and another, i.e., that one type of sensory stimulation creates perception in another sense. This has most commonly been recognized between sight and hearing. For example, when they hear a particular melodic key they simultaneously see, in their inner vision, a particular colour. The composer Scriabin was noted for having this facility. The psychological term is "synesthesia". MacDonald seems to have possessed this faculty or gift in a preeminent way. For example, he intermixes not only music and colour in his imagery, but also music and fragrance, and other combinations which create wonderful and intense effects through what is normally described as metaphor.

[68] George MacDonald. Phantastes: A Faery Romance (First published in 1858), (This edition: Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981) p. 7.

from a soul gifted with the poet's imagination:

> "Well, Tom", I said, "have you made it out?"
>
> "I can't say I have, sir....But I must tell you one thing, sir: every time I read it over -twenty times, I dare say- I thought I was lying on my mother's grave, as I lay that terrible night [when he felt abandoned by every living friend and relative]; and then at the end there you were standing over me and saying, "Can I do anything to help you?"
>
> "...I [his teacher] saw the imagination outrunning the intellect, and manifesting to the heart what the brain could not yet understand.[69]

While these experiences are happening to the characters in the stories, MacDonald is, at the same time, introducing his readers into strange new worlds. In the realistic novels this mechanism is especially evident when he relates a character's dream. For example, in Wilfred Cumbermeade (1872), we enter into the protagonists dream where he is in a large palace seeking his beloved "Anastasia" whom he has lost but is unable to recall how. (Perhaps symbolizing our sense of original loss of God through the remote Original Sin which we consciously no longer remember, yet still feel the aloneness, the sometimes estrangement, the want of the fulfilling love of our God.) He wanders from room to room, in one room finding her handkerchief scented with perfume. When he has all but given up hope of finding her, he says:

> I sat down and wept. But while I wept, hope dawned afresh, and I rose and again followed the quest until I found myself in a little chapel....It was filled with the sound of an organ, distant-faint, and the

[69] George MacDonald. Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood, (First published in 1867, this edition: London: Hurst and Blackett, 1868 ?) p. 297.

> thin music was the same as the odour of the handkerchief...[70]

Little by little the reader is drawn into the character's longing search until his heart too is aflame with love and longing for the beloved. She is eventually found in and with death -death filled with beauty and fulfillment.

This dream is as "perfumed ointment" poured on the head of the protagonist, who, throughout the novel is faced with unfulfilled hopes and misunderstandings beyond his control. His best friend, Charley Osborn, tragically commits suicide. Influenced by prejudice, the woman he loves also misunderstands him and marries another. The dream that the protagonist has occurs when he is in his teens. He is staying as a guest in a large house along with Charley and his sister Jane. When he wakes from the dream, he is astonished to find Jane lying in bed next to him, asleep. (How she arrived there we can only guess, MacDonald never tells us, perhaps she sleepwalked.) Anyway, when he looks over at her in the early dawn light, she too has been dreaming and still is dreaming -weeping in her sleep. And at that moment he has a flash of recognition --she is his Anastasia, the beloved. Everything conspires to keep them apart, as already stated, and at the end of the novel her husband has died. She has sent for him. He is preparing to go to her, but the reader is left with the impression that, regardless of what happens, his dream will one day come true since at the root of it is a

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[70] George MacDonald. Wilfred Cumbermeade, (London: Hurst and Blackett Publishers, 3 vol., 1872) vol. 2, p. 289.

truth-filled longing for love, too deep to be false.

In the fantasy stories and novels, MacDonald does not limit himself to momentary dreams, but rather creates a whole new world, marvelously sustained, full of symbolism, to draw in and teach the reader through participatory understanding, especially of such qualities as the relationship between "goodness" and "beauty". These worlds always have in common with the real world such goals and constants as love and moral goodness. For example in the fantasy novel Lilith, the protagonist Mr. Vane reads a manuscript left by his father wherein he is in conversation with Mr. Raven (Adam) who tells him:

> "There is in your house a door one step which carries me into a world very much different than this.
>
> "A better?"
>
> "Not throughout, but so much another that most of its physical and many of its mental laws are different from those of this world. As for moral laws, they must everywhere be fundamentally the same."[71] (my emphasis)

In this same novel there is a reference to the constant of "real love" in every world. Mr. Vane in his encounter with a leopardess, having already seen the treachery of another says:

> but if I turned from every show of love lest it should be feigned, how was I ever to find the real love which must be somewhere in every world.[72]

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[71] George MacDonald. Lilith (1895) (Whitehorn, California: Johannessen Pub. Co., 1994 reprint of Chatto & Windus, London 1896 ed.) Chapter 8 (p. 39).

[72] George MacDonald. Lilith (1895) opus cit., Chap. 24.

He is able to create an eschatological beauty of perfection based in moral goodness and love, which captivates our hearts and makes us long to strive for the goodness which will grant us a co-natural entrance to it. This ability to express genuine goodness was one of the chief qualities which Auden singled out as MacDonald's special gift. In a 1966 "Afterword" to MacDonald's fantasy story The Golden Key he writes:

> To me, George MacDonald's most extraordinary, and precious gift, is his ability, in all his stories, to create an atmosphere of goodness about which there is nothing phony or moralistic. Nothing is rarer in literature. As Simone Weil well observed: "Imaginary evil is romantic and varied; real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring. Imaginary good is boring; real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating. Imaginative literature, therefore, is either boring or immoral or a mixture of both." George MacDonald's tales are a proof that this is not necessarily the case. That is why, though there are many writers far greater than he, his permanent importance in literature is assurred.[73]

MacDonald introduces us to these worlds by such devices as simply searching for the mystical "golden key"[74] at the base of a rainbow ("The Golden Key") or stepping through a mirror as in Lilith. Or in Phantastes, when upon awakening, the protagonist's [Anodos'] bedroom is slowly transformed before his very eyes, as if, all along, this world were interpenetrated by another:

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[73] "Afterword" to "The Golden Key" by George MacDonald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967) p.86.

[74] Perhaps referring to:

> "that golden key
> That opes the palace of eternity"

in Milton's "Comus" (lines 13-14) which MacDonald was quite familiar with.

> looking out of bed, I saw that a large green marble basin, in which I was wont to wash, and which stood on a low pedestal of the same material in a corner of my room, was overflowing like a spring; and that a stream of clear water was running over the carpet, all the length of the room, finding its outlet I knew not where. And, stranger still, where this carpet, which I had myself designed to imitate a field of grass and daisies, bordered the course of the little stream, the grassblades and daisies seemed to wave in a tiny breeze that followed the water's flow; while under the rivulet they bent and swayed with every motion of the changeful current, as if they were about to dissolve with it, and, forsaking their fixed form, become fluent as the waters.
>
> My dressing table was an old fashioned piece of furniture of black oak, with drawers all down the front. These were elaborately carved in foliage, of which ivy formed the chief part. The nearer end of this table remained just as it had been, but on the further end a singular change had commenced. I happened to fix my eye on a little cluster of ivyleaves. The first of these was evidently the work of the carver; the next looked curious; the third was unmistakably ivy; and just beyond it a tendril of clematis had twined itself about the gilt handle of one of the drawers. Hearing next a slight motion above me, I looked up, and saw that the branches and leaves designed upon the curtains of my bed were slightly in motion. Not knowing what change might follow next, I thought it high time to get up; and springing from the bed, my bare feet alighted upon a cool green sward; and although I dressed in all haste, I found myself completing my toilet under the boughs of a great tree, whose top waved in the golden stream of the sunrise with many interchanging lights, and with shadows of leaf and branch gliding over leaf and branch, as the cool morning wind swung it to and fro, like a sinking sea-wave.[75]

With such simplicity of transformation, he awakens us to a deeper reality pervading the present reality, which he later shows to be more important, in the moral and eternal sense, than the present, and hence, leaves the reader more sensitive to

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[75] George MacDonald. Phantastes, opus cit., pp. 9-10.

those realities.[76] Once awakened, they cannot be put to rest again, just as love, once awakened enlivens a dormant part of the heart and although it can be muted it cannot be made silent.

Fantasy: A Medium for eschatological Beauty and moral Good

So often, when reading a religious tract or some inspired writing of a particular world religion, it is approached with an overly critical or prejudicial attitude. This is usually due to our own fears or of its possible contradiction of our own "faith". However, when we enter the world of "Fantasy" we put aside our incredulity and our prejudices precisely because of the genre we are reading. We are again as children listening to those familiar opening words "Once upon a time...". Likewise, for a non-believer, fantasy literature in this way can be a door to the supernatural which would normally remain firmly shut.

One of George MacDonald's sons described the land of "fairie" which his father created for readers as:

> the land where the relation of truth and beauty is easily explained in the vernacular; the land where

[76] Stephen Prickett, commenting on this passage of Phantastes in his book Victorian Fantasy, says "The mysterious arbitrariness of the transformation taps archetypal fantasies in all of us: haven't we all, at one time or another, imagined patterned carpets coming to life? In the Salem witch trials of the seventeenth century in Massachussetts one of the accused witches was said to have done just that....The flowering of the man-made decorations in the carpet and the carvings immediately suggests that this other world, Fairyland, is to be in some way more real that the one Anodos is leaving." (Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979) p. 179.

> life lost for love is found in glory; the land where love is the reward of love, and never its price.[77]

A fantasy work can overtly express relations and rewards which are only hinted at in everyday life. It possesses the ability to express in intelligible forms the things which transcendently interpenetrate our daily living and bring them out into the light. It offers a language of expression to the deepest longings, hopes and fears of the human heart, things which religious teachings can only point to and mystical experience confirm, but in such a way that it cannot be communicated in human language. Through the medium of fantasy, eschatological perfection can be experienced in a symbolic mythological vicarious way, giving testimony and encouragement to the heart and spirit. The effectiveness of fantasy to do this ultimately rests on whether it articulates to Man the truth about himself. As soon as we acknowledge a transcendent aspect of Man, that is, that he lives in relationship to a hidden dimension and this relationship affects his growth and happiness here and now (and after death), then the articulation of that dimension is of the utmost importance. It has been the sad history of organised religion that its articulation of that dimension and Man's duties and responsibilities in relation to it has often resulted in the stifling of, rather than the enrichment of human nature. Jesus Christ was God incarnate as Man, not as Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, or even Christian. If, then, he reveals anything, it is how to live as a human being with human being

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[77] Ronald MacDonald. "George MacDonald: A personal Note" published in From a Northern Window: Papers, Critical, Historical and Imaginative (London: James Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1911) p.62.

defined as having a transcendent nature.

Religion or fantasy literature is of value then, to the degree that its articulation of the transcendent reveals Man to himself in the entire context of his existence, both the material world of here and now and the transcendent which inter-penetrates the present and endures to eternity, so that Man is enriched and fulfilled precisely as Man. Mythopoeic Fantasy, offers a door of universal entrance to all human beings which opens upon the mystery of their existence and is able to explicitly illustrate within this ambience relationships between truth and beauty, goodness and joy and life-filled death; evil and the misery and sadness of a living-death --things which realistic novels can only hint at-- and show the inner transformation which such values produce.

For example in MacDonald's children story "The Wise Woman, or The Lost Princess", we come in contact with the Princess Rosamond who was utterly spoiled by her parents and has gradually become a selfish brute of a girl who is unhappy with herself and with every thing around her. She becomes so unmanageable that her parents seek out the help of the Wise Woman. She is a supernatural sort of being -an embodiment, perhaps, of the Holy Spirit. When she visits the king and queen she sees that it is these very parents who have created this little monster; and so, she secretly kidnaps the girl in order to free her from that environment and to teach her goodness and unselfishness.

At first Rosamond's training consists in being allowed to go to a distant part of her father's Kingdom by way of stepping through the frame of a picture of that area. She thinks she has escaped the Wise Woman, but is quite lost and is taken in by a husband and wife who treat her like an ordinary orphan (her claims of being a princess being utterly scorned) and teach her to contribute her labour to the upkeep of the house and punish her when she doesn't do so. She is not keen on this at all and would have run away but for the sheepdog Prince, who was put in charge of her and who becomes her first teacher. She does begin to make some human progress in this simple life, however, she eventually makes herself so unpleasant, with her rages and selfishness that the wife insists that she is put out of the cottage and find another situation.

Rosamund is happy with this, for she feels she can find her way back to the Palace and resume her old life. However, she soon becomes lost in a peat-bog and the Wise Woman, under the appearance of an old woman, comes to her rescue. The girl is at a point where she is fed up with herself, would like to change, but doesn't know how to. The Wise Woman invites her to her cottage, where, if she comes, she is promised the help "to be good and lovely"[78].

To make progress she learns that she must be tried, that is, go

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[78] George MacDonald. "The Wise Woman, or The Lost Princess", (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980 reprint of 1875 edition) ch. 11, p. 80.

through experiences that will test her virtue. So she enters a room in the cottage which is described as a "mood chamber", where she finds herself in various cicumstances and at the same time has forgotten that she has entered them from the mood chamber. She fails the first two trials, her selfishness and anger getting the better of her and resulting in the hurting of an animal and the accidental death of another child; and is humbled to the point of asking the Wise Woman's help for the third trial. Once she has asked, the Wise Woman says that she can help her and the third trial begins. It is this third trial that we wish to present in detail with regard to the eschatological beauty that the ambience of fantasy can create. We must reproduce a large part of it here in order to exemplify what we are asserting:

> Yet again she led her to the same door, and seemed to the princess to send her yet again alone into the room. She was in a forest, a place half wild, half tended. The trees were grand, and full of the loveliest birds, all glowing, gleaming and radiant colors, which, unlike the brilliant birds we know in our world, sang deliciously, every one according to his color. The trees were not at all crowded, but their leaves were so thick, and their boughs spread so far, that it was only here and there a sunbeam could get straight through. All the gentle creatures of a forest were there, but no creatures that killed, not even a weasel to kill the rabbits, or a beetle to eat the snails out of their striped shells. As to butterflies, words would but wrong them if they tried to tell how gorgeous they were. The princess's delight was so great that she neither laughed nor ran, but walked about with a solemn countenance and stately step.
>
> "But where are the flowers?" she said to herself at length.
>
> They were nowhere. Neither on the high trees, nor on the few shrubs that grew here and there amongst them, were there any blossoms; and in the grass that grew everywhere there was not a single flower to be seen.

"Ah, well!" said Rosamond again to herself; "where all the birds and butterflies are living flowers, we can do without the other sort."

Still she could not help feeling that flowers were wanted to make the beauty of the forest complete.

Suddenly she came out on a little open glade; and there, on the root of a great oak, sat the loveliest little girl, with her lap full of flowers of all colors, but of such kind as Rosamond had never before seen. She was playing with them -burying her hands in them, tumbling them about, and every now and then picking one from the rest, and throwing it away. All the time she never smiled, except with her eyes, which were as full as they could hold of the laughter of the spirit -a laughter which in this world is never heard, only sets the eyes alight with a liquid shining. Rosamond drew nearer, for the wonderful creature would have drawn a tiger to her side, and tamed him on the way. A few yards away from her, she came upon one of her cast-away flowers and stooped to pick it up, as well she might where none grew save in her own longing. But to her amazement she found, instead of a flower thrown away to wither, one fast rooted and quite at home. She left it, and went to another; but it also was fast in the soil, and growing comfortably in the warm grass. What could it mean? One after another she tried, until at length she was satisfied that it was the same with every flower the little girl threw from her lap.

She watched then until she saw her throw one, and instantly bounded to the spot. But the flower had been quicker than she: there it grew, fast fixed in the earth, and, she thought, looked at at her roguishly.

"Don't! don't!" cried the child. "My flowers cannot live in your hands."

Rosamond looked at the flower. It was withered already. She threw it from her, offended. The child rose, with difficulty keeping her lapful together, picked it up, carried it back, sat down again, spoke to it, kissed it, sang to it...and threw it away. Up rose its little head, and there it was, busy growing again!

Rosamond's bad temper soon gave way: the beauty and sweetness of the child had overcome it; and, anxious to make friends with her, she drew near, and said: "Won't you give me a little flower, please, you beautiful child?"

"There they are; they are all for you," answered the

child, pointing with her outstretched arm and forefinger all round.

"But you told me, a minute ago, not to touch them."

"Yes, indeed, I did."

"They can't be mine, if I'm not to touch them."

"If, to call them yours you must kill them, then they are not yours, and never, never can be yours. They are nobody's when they are dead."

"But you don't kill them."

"I don't pull them; I throw them away. I live them." [the paradoxical mystery of selfless love]

"How is it that you make them grow?"

"I say, 'You darling!' and throw it away and there it is."

"Where do you get them from?"

"In my lap."

"I wish you would let me throw one away."

"Have you got any in your lap? Let me see."

"No, I have none."

"Then you can't throw one away, if you haven't got one."

"You are mocking me!" cried the princess.

"I am not mocking you," said the child, looking her full in the face, with reproach in her large blue eyes.

"Oh, that's where the flowers come from!" said the princess to herself, the moment she saw them, hardly knowing what she meant.

Then the child rose as if hurt, and quickly threw away all the flowers she had in her lap, but one by one, and without any sign of anger. When they were all gone, she stood a moment, and then, in a kind of chanting cry, called, two or three times, "Peggy! Peggy! Peggy!"

A low glad cry, like the whinny of a horse, answered, and, presently, out of the wood on the opposite side of the glade, came gently trotting the lovliest little snow-white pony, with great shining blue wings, half

lifted from his shoulders. Straight towards the little girl, neither hurrying nor lingering, he trotted with light elastic tread.

Rosamond's love for animals broke into a perfect passion of delight at the vision. She rushed to meet the pony with such haste, that, although clearly the best trained animal under the sun, he started back, plunged, reared, and struck out with his fore-feet ere he had time to observe what sort of creature it was that had so startled him. When he perceived it was a little girl, he dropped instantly upon all fours, and content with avoiding her, resumed his quiet trot in the direction of his mistress, Rosamond stood gazing after him in miserable disappointment.

When he reached the child, he laid his head on her shoulder, and she put her arm up round his neck; and after she had talked to him a little, he turned and came trotting back to the princess.

Almost beside herself with joy, she began caressing him in the rough way which, notwithstanding her love for them, she was in the habit of using with animals; and she was not gentle enough, in herself even, to see that he did not like it, and was only putting up with it for the sake of his mistress. But when, that she might jump upon his back, she laid hold of one of his wings and ruffled some of the blue feathers, he wheeled suddenly about, gave his long tail a sharp whisk which threw her flat on the grass, and, trotting back to his mistress, bent down his head before her as if asking excuse for ridding himself of the unbearable.

The princess was furious. She had forgotten all her past life up to the time when she first saw the child: her beauty had made her forget, and yet she was now on the very borders of hating her. What she might have done, or rather tried to do, had not Peggy's tail struck her down with such force that for a moment she could not rise, I cannot tell.

But while she lay half stunned, her eyes fell on a little flower just under them. It stared up in her face like the living thing it was, and she could not take her eyes off its face. It was like a primrose trying to express doubt instead of confidence. It seemed to put her half in mind of something, and she felt as if shame were coming. She put out her hand to pluck it; but the moment her fingers touched it, the flower withered up, and hung as dead on its stalks as if a flame of fire had passed over it.

Then a shudder thrilled through the heart of the princess, and she thought with herself, saying -"What

sort of a creature am I that the flowers wither when I touch them, and the ponies despise me with their tails? What a wretched, course, ill-bred creature I must be!

(The reader can't help but ask themselves if, in their dealings with others, they give life or wither the life in them as Rosamund does with flowers.)

There is that lovely child giving life instead of death to the flowers, and a moment ago I was hating her! I am made horrid, and I shall be horrid, and I hate myself, and yet I can't help being myself!"

She heard the sound of galloping feet, and there was the pony, with the child seated betwixt his wings, coming straight on at full speed for where she lay.

"I don't care," she said. "They may trample me under their feet if they like. I am tired and sick of myself -a creature at whose touch the flowers wither!"

On came the winged pony. But while yet some distance off, he gave a great bound, and spread out his living sails of blue, rose yards and yards above her in the air, and alighted as gently as a bird, just a few feet on the other side of her. The child slipped down and came and kneeled over her.

"Did my pony hurt you?" she said. "I am so sorry!"

"Yes, he hurt me," answered the princess, "but not more than I deserved, for I took liberties with him, and he did not like it."

"Oh, you dear!" said the little girl. "I love you for talking so of my Peggy. He is a good pony, though a little playful sometimes. Would you like a ride upon him?"

"You darling beauty!" cried Rosamond, sobbing. "I do love you so, you are so good. How did you become so sweet?"

"Would you like to ride my pony?" repeated the child, with a heavenly smile in her eyes.

"No, no; he is fit only for you. My clumsy body would hurt him," said Rosamond.

"You don't mind me having such a pony?" said the child.

"What! mind it?" cried Rosamond, almost indignantly. Then remembering certain thoughts that had but a few moments before passed through her mind, she looked on

the ground and was silent.

"You don't mind it, then?" repeated the child.

"I am very glad there is such a you and such a pony, and that such a you has got such a pony," said Rosamond, still looking on the ground. "But I do wish the flowers would not die when I touch them. I was cross to see you make them grow, but now I should be content if only I did not make them wither."

As she spoke, she stroked the little girl's bare feet, which were by her, half buried in the soft moss, and as she ended she laid her cheek on them and kissed them.

"Dear princess!" said the little girl, "the flowers will not always wither at your touch. Try now -only do not pluck it. Flowers ought never to be plucked except to give away. Touch it gently."

A silvery flower, something like a snowdrop, grew just within her reach. Timidly she stretched out her hand and touched it. The flower trembled, but neither shrank nor withered.

"Touch it again," said the child.

It changed color a little, and Rosamond fancied it grew larger.

"Touch it again," said the child.

It opened and grew until it was as large as a narcissus, and changed and deepened in color till it was a red glowing gold.

Rosamond gazed motionless. When the transfiguration of the flower was perfected, she sprang to her feet with clasped hands, but for very ecstasy of joy stood speechless, gazing at the child.

"Did you never see me before, Rosamond?" she asked.

"No, never," answered the princess. "I never saw any thing half so lovely."

"Look at me," said the child.

And as Rosamond looked, the child began, like the flower, to grow larger. Quickly through every gradation of growth she passed, until she stood before her a woman perfectly beautiful, neither old nor young; for hers was the old age of everlasting youth.

Rosamond was utterly enchanted, and stood gazing

without word or movement until she could endure no more delight. Then her mind collapsed to the thought - had the pony grown too? She glanced round. There was no pony, no grass, no flowers, no bright-birded forest- but the cottage of the wise woman -and before her, on the hearth of it, the goddess-child, the only thing unchanged.

She gasped with astonishment.

"You must set out for your father's palace immediately," said the lady.

"But where is the wise woman?" asked Rosamond, looking all about.

"Here," said the lady.

And Rosamond, looking again, saw the wise woman, folded as usual in her long dark cloak.

"And it was you all the time?" she cried in delight, and kneeled before her, burying her face in her garments.

"It always is me, all the time," said the wise woman, smiling.

"But which is the real you?" asked Rosamond, "this or that?"

"Or a thousand others?" returned the wise woman. "But the one you have just seen is the likest to the real me that you are able to see just yet -but- . And that me you could not have seen a little while ago. -"But, my darling child," she went on, lifting her up and clasping her to her bosom, "you must not think, because you have seen me once, that therfore you are capable of seeing me at all times. No; there are many things in you yet that must be changed before that can be. Now, however, you will seek me. Every time you feel you want me, that is a sign I am wanting you. There are yet many rooms in my house you may have to go through; but when you need no more of them, then you will be able to throw flowers like the little girl you saw in the forest."

The princess gave a sigh.

"Do you think," the wise woman went on, "that the things you have seen in my house are mere empty shows. You do not know, you cannot yet think, how living and true they are. -Now you must go."

She led her once more into the great hall, and there showed her the picture of her father's capital, and

his palace with the brazen gates.

"There is your home," she said, " Go to it."

The princess understood, and a flush of shame rose to her forehead. She turned to the wise woman and said: "Will you forgive me **all** my naughtiness, and **all** the trouble I have given you?"

"If I had not forgiven you, I would never had taken the trouble to punish you. If I had not loved you, do you think I would have carried you away in my cloak?"

"How could you love such an ugly, ill-tempered, rude, hateful little wretch?"

"I saw through it all, what you were going to be," said the wise woman, kissing her. "But remember you have yet only **begun** to be what I saw."[79]

Rosamond's experiences and growth in goodness are expressed by MacDonald in terms of visible beauty and perfection. This is done in a way which captivates the subconscious mind of the reader and inflames his heart in such a way that s/he really wants to be good. And this, because the relationship between beauty and goodness are embodied in intelligible forms which the reader recognises as truth about what it means to be human. This children's fairy-tale speaks to all the childlike and helps them to discover the truth about themselves as human beings -about the things necessary to finding happiness and growth in that discovery.

In the final part of the above quotation, there is also presented the notion of understanding and true perception through likeness. That is, only as the princess grew in moral

[79] George MacDonald, "The Wise Woman or The Lost Princess", opus cit., ch. 13, pp. 88-97.

goodness was she able to perceive the true nature of the wise woman, who was the beauty of moral perfection itself. This is something the Greek philosophers expressed -understanding through likeness. For example, they would say that it was precisely because the human being was composed of air, earth, fire, and water (the four basic elements) that s/he was able to perceive the world around him which was made up of these. And the Greek Fathers taught that the human being achieved union with God because and through likeness to Him, namely moral perfection and the contemplation which that enabled; or Biblically "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God".

Moral growth and perception

The question of to what extent, or if at all, people actually perceive the things around them as they objectively are or if rather they are only ever perceived with a subjective bias is something we take up at greater length in the last chapter. Fantasy, however, offers a rich medium in regard to showing the relationship between moral perfection and the perception of things as they truly are. It reveals the "common ground" for such understanding which is goodness -likeness to the Creator. (The need for "common ground" for understanding is itself self-evident.)

In the "Curdie" stories MacDonald helps us to see that our perception of things is based on sympathy of likeness; and that

other people may sincerely not see things the way we do. Princess Irene and Curdie (a young miner) are the main characters in these two fantasy works: The Princess and the Goblin (1872) and The Princess and Curdie (1883). In both novels the touchstone to the supernatural is Irene's Great Great Grandmother. She dwells in the uppermost part of the castle, is not seen by everyone, and when seen, is only seen as she really is by those who are morally good.[80] And even then, their perception of her appearance changes as their moral condition either improves or worsens. In The Princess and the Goblin, the first time Curdie is escorted to the Grandmother by Irene he doesn't perceive her at all, nor her chamber:

> "Make a bow to my grandmother, Curdie," she said.
>
> "I don't see any grandmother," answered Curdie rather gruffly.
>
> "Don't see my grandmother, when I'm sitting in her lap!"exclaimed the princess.
>
> "No, I don't," reiterated Curdie, in an offended tone.
>
> "Don't you see the lovely fire of roses -white ones amongst them this time?" asked Irene, almost as bewildered as he.
>
> "No, I don't," answered Curdie, almost sulkily.
>
> "Nor the blue bed? Nor the rose-coloured counterpane? Nor the beautiful light, like the moon, hanging from the roof?"
>
> "You're making game of me, your royal highness; and after what we have come through together this day, I don't think it is kind of you," said Curdie, feeling very much hurt.
>
> "Then what do you see?" asked Irene, who perceived at once that for her not to believe him was at least as bad as for him not to believe her.

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[80] Similarly, in MacDonald's fantasy novel At the Back of the North Wind, North Wind, is perceived by the Christlike young boy Diamond as a lovely young woman, whereas she is perceived by a negligent nurse as a vicious wolf.

> "I see a big, bare, garret room....I see a tub, a heap of straw, and a withered apple, and a ray of sunlight coming through a hole in the middle of the roof, and shining on your head, and making all the place look a curious dusky brown. I think you had better drop it, princess, and go down to the nursery, like a good girl."
>
> "But don't you hear my grandmother talking to me?" asked Irene, almost crying.
>
> "No, I hear the cooing of a lot of pidgeons."[81]

By the end of the novel, although Curdie never sees Irene's Grandmother, he does come to believe both that Irene sees her and that she does exist and that she has helped him.

In The Princess and Curdie, MacDonald tells us that as the years passed Curdie began to doubt whether the whole episode of Irene's grandmother was not but a childish dream. He says of him that:

> he was becoming more and more a miner and less a man of the upper world....He was gradually changing into a commonplace man[82]

He then makes an interesting comment on human growth which bears

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[81] George MacDonald. The Princess and the Goblin (1872) (London: Octopus Books, 1979) chap. 22.

[82] George MacDonald. The Princess and Curdie (1883) (London: Octopus Books Ltd., 1979) ch. 2, pp. 473-474.

In both these novels there is a threefold division: the underground where the Goblins dwell and the miners work, the normal above ground which we inhabit, and the upper rooms of the castle where the Great great Grandmother dwells. Some have interpreted this as the Freudian three-fold division of the id, the ego and the superego. And indeed such an interpretation can hold. However, MacDonald generally presents it as the underground where emotions rule and no sense of the supernatural is perceived; the normal above ground where people either progress or regress spiritually and morally (for MacDonald an inseparable combination); and the upper realms where abiding spiritual realities are encountered.

He then makes an interesting comment on human growth which bears quoting:

> There is this difference between the growth of some human beings and that of others: in the one case it is a continuous dying, in the other a continuous resurrection. One of the latter sort comes at length to know at once whether a thing is true the moment it comes before him; one of the former class grows more and more afraid of being taken in, so afraid of it that he takes himself in altogether, and comes at length to believe in nothing but his dinner: to be sure of a thing with him is to have it between his teeth.[83]

His first encounter with her comes when he has wounded a white pigeon and recalls Princess Irene having told him that the white pigeons belonged to her grandmother. The suffering creature brought pity and compunction to his heart. He decides to bring the pigeon to its owner and goes to her upper room. He knocks, she invites him in and he remains, at first, standing in the dooway:

> "Why don't you come in, Curdie?" said a voice. Did you never see moonlight before?"
>
> "Never without a moon," answered Curdie, in a trembling voice.
>
> "Certainly not," returned the voice, which was thin and quavering. "I never saw moonlight without a moon."
>
> "But there is no moon outside," said Curdie.
>
> "Ah! but you are inside now," said the voice.
>
> The answer did not satisfy Curdie; but the voice went on.
>
> "There are more moons than you know of, Curdie. Where there is one sun there are many moons--and of many sorts...[84]

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[83] Ibid. p. 474.

[84] Ibid. p. 480.

This engimatic conversation about the moon expresses the relationship we have with God, whose light and life we are meant to reflect in ourselves -He being the Sun and we being the many moons.

So far the only description we have had of Curdie's perception of the grandmother is her voice and that was "thin and quavering". She is sitting in the moonlight spinning at her wheel. When he walks towards her he sees:

> a small withered creature, so old that no age would have seemed too great to write under her picture, seated on a stool behind the spinning-wheel, which looked very large beside her ...[she] looked like a long-legged spider holding up its own web which was the round wheel itself. She sat crumpled together, a filmy thing that it seemed a puff of wind would blow away, more like the body of a fly the big spider had sucked empty and left hanging in his web than anything else I can think of.[85]

They get into conversation about the pigeon and this leads to some moral advice to the youth. It begins when he sees how distressed she is over the hurt pigeon he has now handed to her.

> When Curdie saw how distressed she was he grew sorrier still, and said: "I didn't mean to do any harm, ma'am. I didn't think of its being yours."
>
> Ah, Curdie! if it weren't mine, what would become of it now?" she returned. "You say you didn't mean any harm: did you mean any good, Curdie?"
>
> "No," answered Curdie.
>
> Remember, then, that whoever does not mean good is always in danger of harm. But I try to give everybody fair play; and those that are in the wrong are in far more need of it than those who are in the right: they can afford to do without it. Therefore, I say for you

[85] Ibid. p. 481.

> that when you shot that arrow you did not know what a pigeon is. Now that you do know, you are sorry. It is very dangerous to do a thing you don't know about."[86]

She goes on to speak to him about the attitude with which he faces the things in his life and leads him to realize that without an attitude of seeking to do good, an attitude of openness --"seeing a pigeon for what it is"-- he has been living in a closed world and has lost some of the ability to perceive wrong. To this he says:

> When I killed your bird I did not know I was doing wrong, just because I was always doing wrong, and the wrong had soaked all through me....I [have been]...doing the wrong of never trying to be better.[87]

From this point he begins a new moral direction and even before he leaves her room he begins to perceive her differently:

> when or how it came about, Curdie could not tell -- the same instant, she stood before him a tall, strong woman -- plainly very old, but as grand as she was old....Every trace of decreptitude and witheredness as she hovered like a film about her wheel had vanished....Straight as a pillar she stood before the astonished boy.[88]

As the novel progresses and Curdie grows in goodness, she is perceived by him as more and more beautiful.[89] Both here, and in "The Wise Woman", this explicit association between beauty and goodness, confirms the reader's innermost longings and intuitions and gives direction and courage to their lives.

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[86] Ibid. p. 482.

[87] Ibid. p. 483.

[88] Ibid. p. 486.

[89] e.g. p. 496 "a lady Beautiful exceedingly....about five and twenty years old"

As Perfumed Ointment: The Contemplative Gaze[90]

We spoke above of how eschatological imagery can bridge the incomprehensibleness of suffering and evil by providing a glimpse of the goal which is already inchoately felt by way of intuition. This grows in the person as they become more God-like, more Christ-like. But the ability to put these inchoate feelings into intelligible forms is a difficult task. MacDonald, in his final fantasy novel Lilith (1895), a fantasy full of Biblical imagery and overt Christianity, attempts to put into forms and imagery what the "New Heaven and New Earth" and the "New Jerusalem" will be like and what transpires in the human heart caught up in the perfection of the resurrection. The last chapters become a sustained narrative of atmospheric contemplation that captivates the subconscious and the heart of the reader. You accompany the protagonist as if you are he and touch the inner secret of the essence of your being -bliss itself.

Chapter 44 begins with the awakening of the protagonist, Mr. Vane, from death's sleep in the great house of the dead looked after by Adam and Eve. (We describe more of this in the next

[90] Contemplation, from a strictly philosophical perspective (if there is such a distinction) is seen as knowledge accompanied by delight. Generally, the gazing at something of beauty which capivates our attention. Theologically, it is gazing at God or some aspect of his creation in which is communicated delight and captivating love --his very life, which raises and refreshes and speaks of a quality of life within which one longs to be part of, not by possesion but by surrender.(cf. St John of the Cross Living Flame of Love; St Francis de Sales Treatise on the Love of God).

chapter in relation to people we have hurt and of whom we need forgiveness.) The first person he sees is his beloved Lona who had been slain by her mother and whom Mr Vane had carried with him to Adam and Eve that she might have a place of rest in their great house. He awakes and becomes conscious of his awakening:

> "At last!" I said in my heart, and leapt for joy. I turned my eyes; Lona stood by my couch, waiting for me! I had never lost her! --only for a little time lost the sight of her! Truly I needed not lament her so sorely!
>
> It was dark, as I say, but I saw her: she was not dark! Her eyes shone with the radiance of the Mother's [Eve's], and the same light issued from her face--nor from her face only, for her death-dress, filled with the light of her body now tenfold awake in the power of its resurrection, was white as snow and glistering. She fell asleep a girl; she awoke a woman, ripe with the loveliness of the life essential. I folded her in my arms, and knew that I lived indeed.[91]

They are then joined by Adam and Eve and Mara[92] before they leave to make their way to the New Jerusalem:

> I kneeled and humbly thanked the three for helping me to die. Lona knelt beside me, and they all breathed upon us.
>
> "Hark! I hear the sun," said Adam.
>
> I listened: he was coming with the rush as of a thousand times ten thousand far-off wings, with the roar of a molten and flaming world millions of miles away. His approach was a crescendo chord of hundreds of harmonies.
>
> The three looked at each other and smiled, and that smile went floating heavenward a three-petaled flower, the family's morning thanksgiving. From their mouths and faces it spread over their bodies and shone

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[91] George MacDonald. Lilith (1895) opus cit., chapter 44, p. 249.

[92] Mara is a beautiful woman whose face is almost always covered for she is the one who from her "house of bitterness" brings people to repentance. Her hidden, beautiful face, represents the secret true blessings of pain and suffering.

> through their garments. Ere I could say, "Lo, they change!" Adam and Eve stood before me the angels of the resurrection, and Mara was the Magdelene with them at the sepulchre. The countenance of Adam was like lightning, and Eve held a knapkin that flung flakes of splendour about the place.[93]

They begin their journey "home" accompanied by a group of children who have awakened just after them.

> It had ceased to be dark; we walked in a dim twilight, breathing through the dimness the breath of spring. A wonderous change had passed upon the world--or was it not rather that a change more marvellous had taken place in us?" Without light enough in the sky or the air to reveal anything, every heather-bush, every small shrub, every blade of grass was perfectly visible--either by light that went out from it, as fire from the bush Moses saw in the desert, or by light that went out of our eyes. Nothing cast a shadow; all things interchanged a little light. Every growing thing showed me, by shape and colour, its indwelling idea--the informing thought, that is, which was its being, and sent it out. My bare feet seemed to love every plant they trod upon. The microcosm and the macrocosm were at length atoned, at length in harmony! I lived in everything; everything entered and lived in me. To be aware of a thing, was to know its very life at once and mine, to know whence we came, and where we were at home--was to know that we are all what we are, because Another is what he is! Sense after sense, hitherto asleep, awoke in me--sense after sense indescribable, because no correspondent words, no likenesses or imaginations exist, wherewithal to describe them. Full indeed--yet ever expanding, ever making room to receive--was the conscious being where things kept entering by so many doors! When a little breeze brushing a bush of heather set its purple bells a ringing, I was myself in the joy of the bells, myself in the joy of the breeze...myself in the joy of the sense, and of the soul that received the joys together. To everything glad I lent the hall of my being wherin to revel. I was a peaceful ocean upon which the ground-swell of a living joy was continually lifting new waves; yet was the joy ever the same joy, the eternal joy, with tens of thousands of changing forms....
>
> Now I knew that life and truth were one; that life mere and pure is in itself bliss; that where being is not bliss, it is not life, but life-in-death. Every

[93] Ibid. pp. 251-252.

> inspiration of the dark wind that blew where it listed, went out a sigh of thanksgiving. At last I was! I lived, and nothing could touch my life! My darling walked beside me, and we were on our way home to the Father!
>
> So much was ours ere ever the first sun rose upon our freedom: what must not the eternal day bring with it![94]

They continue their journey to the city, Vane describing the indescribable. Just as he is about to enter the inner chamber of God, he finds himself back in the mundane world where the novel began, yet now waiting in hope, not knowing whether he is still in the house of the dead dreaming or whether he is awake and all was a dream. The reality of his experience, though, becomes the motivating force of his consciousness as he knows that this life contains the seed of that fulness of life. The novel ends with this thought and the hope that that fulfillment which we can begin to imagine will one day be the reality:

> when I wake at last into that life which, as a mother her child, carries this life in its bosom, I shall know that I wake, and shall doubt no more.
>
> I wait; asleep or awake, I wait.
>
> Novalis says, "Our life is no dream, but it should and will perhaps become one."[95]

Mr. Vane entered the land of Fairie a self-centred person who didn't know that he knew nothing of who he really was nor from where the source of his life flowed. He leaves it with a sense of direction and courage to search and to lose his life in that

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[94] Ibid. Chapter 45, pp. 254-255. During this sustained narrative he quotes a line from Dante's Paradiso, (x. 142) whom he used to read in the Italian and whom he considered a master poet.

[95] Ibid. p. 264.

search. The human being begins to be defined as "the one who lives to die for love". A paradox flowing from its source: uncreated, self-sustaining Life --itself, ever benevolent, self-sacrificing, giving Love.

In the fantasy novel Phantastes (1858) we meet the protagonist, Anados, a young man, who, like Mr. Vane enters the land of Fairie. He is very noble-minded, but lacks the experience which alone reveals the mettle of our virtue. He falls in love with a woman, whom he finds enclosed in alabaster. Through the gift of poetic song he enlivens and frees her; but she runs off and eludes him. As the novel progresses, his virtue is tested when one of the "tree spirits", disguised as the alabaster woman seduces him. His inability to discern her from the real "alabaster woman" reveals a self-centredness in his love which was unable to see beyond into the other person's reality.

Later in the novel his virtue and selflessness are growing. He catches sight of his beloved "alabaster woman" again and follows her into an underground cavern which is inhabited by gnome-like creatures. They taunt him in his search saying "she is meant for someone better than you". To this he is deeply hurt, however, his love is more genuine now and his thoughts are more for her than himself--her happiness now being his own-- and he thinks within himself, "if that be so, then so much the better for her", and ceases his pursuit.

This realization that love is worth the price of death to our

inner selfishness, and, to whatever the inner core of our being is clothed, e.g., our present flesh and blood existence; conveys and impels the search for true love with self-sacrificing courage.

Conclusion

MacDonald's mythopoeic writings reveal truths hidden within the human subconcious which articulate to Man what it means to be human. They help him to situate himself in the framework of existence in such a way as to give both meaning and direction to life. Through the power of imagination the relationship between truth and goodness, beauty and love are made manifest and ratify the inner intuition already present. The relation between moral goodness and a true perception of people, God and his creation will be taken up again in chapter IV in relation to free moral choice.

In the next chapter we deal with benevolent love, as the true sign of a disciple of Christ, and courageous entrustment to the Source of Life, to God, as the necessary framework for human growth. We explore this, seeking as common ground "humanity", which, we feel, can help to bridge the gap between religion and secular life in the modern world. This, since both seek answers to the same mysteries: life, its meaning, its direction, its goals etc.. We will look at psychology's insights. Not perhaps the present "main-line" ones, but those which recognize the spiritual dimension in Man.

Chapter III

RELIGION AND PSYCHOLOGY

When we speak about religion we generally speak about our relationship with God; and theology helps us to understand who this God is and what that relationship ought to consist of. The general assumption is that we know what a man or woman is from the religious or theological point of view, we possess a theological anthropology. Likewise, other scientific disciplines, in their study of the human being develop their own anthropology. For example, physiological anthropology would study the human being as a biological organism; cultural anthropology would study human social behaviour with regard to race, nationality, and culture; philosophical anthropology would study the ultimate questions concerning the human being such as where do we come from, what is our nature, what is our final goal, etc...; psychological anthropology would study the human being with regard to the interaction of body, mind and spirit, with emphasis on the quantifiable or measurable psychological-somatic elements.

In as much as all of these sciences are studying the same subject - the human being - they should not be at odds with one another but should complement and shed light towards a comprehensive whole picture of the mystery of Man. Yet this is not always the case, even within a particular field of study.

Within Psychology, for example, some would question whether there was a spiritual element in Man to study; and others, if not denying that aspect of the human being, think that perhaps its contents should be included elsewhere, since it is very difficult to quantify and study. Most behaviourists would be of the mindset that the study of transcendental elements does not lend itself to empirical study and hence ignore the area. Whereas the psychodynamic school of Freud reduced Man to a creature controlled by instincts and drives toward pleasure, without freedom and without a spiritual nature. And although Freud's view of religion was complex and tended to change with the passing of time, he often identified it with a regression to infantile behaviour patterns which he would treat as an obsessional neurosis in an adult.

Other schools of psychology, on the other hand, value the spiritual dimension of Man (usually without introducing religion), recognising his/her freedom and self-determination and see this dimension as precisely what it means to be human. These schools are Humanistic Psychology, called the third force in psychology (Behaviourism and Freudian Psychodymanics being the first two forces) and Existential Psychology, many of whose ideas influenced the Humanistic School; and those offshoots of these two primary schools. It is then, these two schools which we will be looking at to complement and contribute to our theological understanding of Man from the science of Psychology. Browning says of religion and psychology that they:

> stand in a special relation to one another because both of them provide concepts and technologies for the

ordering of the interior life.[1]

They help provide keys of meaning for making sense out of life-offering coherence and motivation for living.

The following discussion takes a practical, rather than a speculative approach to the study, looking at how the "growth to perfection" as viewed in Christianity interfaces or even coincides with the idea of the "fully functioning person" of Humanistic Psychology and the "authentic individual" of Existential Psychology. To do this I have sought to translate or express Christian perfection, the perfection of love, in terms which are interchangeable within the two disciplines (psychology and theology), that is, the common ground of human action and attitudes.

The actual living out of these Commandments requires a real interior change of heart and attitudes and actions (sanctification) in the person and not simply some sort of imputed righteousness (justification), that is, not some magical solution to our need for salvation[2]. And so, it is here, in human attitudes and their subsequent actions - motivated behaviour - where we enter into a dialogue with modern Man and Psychology. We begin by trying to translate these commandments into universal terms of human attitude and behaviour. We define

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[1] Don S. Browning. Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) p. 2.

[2] Here we are following the Greek Fathers, i.e., identifying "salvation" with "deification" with the process of becoming God-like.

"love of neighbour as Christ loved us" then, as seeking the good of our neighbour out of benevolence (e.g., as Aristotle describes in his third type of friendship, i.e., to love not for anything we gain in return but simply for themselves), anyone, therefore, who loves in this altruistic way is moving along the path to perfection or salvation.[3] We draw our definition from Jesus' response in the Gospel to the lawyer's question "Who is my neighbour?" in which He presents the "good Samaritan", a man who goes beyond religious and racial barriers to help another Man in need. Jesus says of him that "he was moved to pity by the sight" (Lk. 10:33 NAB) and so helped the man. This "being moved to pity" bespeaks a power or inner dynamic (an intrapsychic or intrapersonal dynamic to use psychological terminology), which somehow obliges us to help. It is awakened by this interpersonal encounter. If we don't help, our conscience[4] convicts and torments us until we either do something

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[3] Some would question whether we are being perfected by virtue of our "loving" or whether this "loving" is simply evidence of our present state of perfection.
To this question, it seems clear that the not responding to someone in need would be a detrimental omission by the person, provided their heart was initially moved to pity, and hence would be a loss. The actual growth in holiness or perfection, however, requires a more intense act of love which results in deeper radication of charity or love in the person. St. Thomas Aquinas addresses this in a discussion on merit where he says that while a simple multiplication of acts does not increase the degree of love, yet they do dispose one for a more intense act. (cf. Summa Theologica, II-II, q. 114, art. 8, ad 3; and II-II, q. 24, art. 4, ad 3.)

[4] As a general statement of what we mean by "conscience", that is, how we might define it for any human being, the term "our heart of hearts" comes to mind.

The Second Vatican Council's document "Gaudium et spes", dealing with the role of the Church in the Modern World, offers a very good religious view of conscience:

about helping or we rationalize the situation away, or we dull our heart through some defence mechanism, which like rationalization, distorts our perception of the reality.

The love of God, on the other hand, is something more difficult to present. Drawing on the Gospel, one finds Jesus imparting trust and confidence in God as "Father", and the Father's goodness and love for us expressed to the disciples through such images as the Father's care of the birds of the air, the beauty of the fields, the simple petition for one's needs in the"Our Father", and above all his desire for the Father's will to be done--with his own entrustment to the Father reaching its peak in the Garden of Gethsemane and upon the cross. For believers then, they describe the love of God as a response to God's all-embracing love and care in every area of their lives. For them, it is a response of trust or entrustment in every situation they encounter, no matter how frightening, which comes from a conscious understanding of His love for them through Revelation and his loving plans for them, combined with an experiential

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> Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells him inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. His dignity lies in observing this law, and by it he will be judged. <u>His conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary.</u> There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths. <u>By conscience, in a wonderful way, that law is made known which is fulfilled in the love of God, and of one's neighbour.</u> (my emphasis) (Vatican II, The Council and Post-Conciliar Documents, <u>Gaudium et spes</u> n. 16, A. Flannery O.P., gen. ed.; Northport, N.Y.: Costello Pub. Co., 1975, p. 916.)

ratification of this love. This frees them to love their neighbour in all circumstances combatting the two great enemies of love: fear and selfishness. They claim an understanding that becomes most intelligible to them through Christ's incarnation - his relation to the Father, his words and works, his life, death and resurrection. For this gives form and personal expression to them of that Life in whom they live and move and have their being, and which is welling up inside them as they seek to conform themselves in thought, word, and deed to the love of Christ in their neighbour. By thus doing the will of the Father, they experience His presence in a communion of life and love corresponding to the promise of Christ "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (Jn. 14:23).

In regard to those who "don't believe", this love of God is expressed as "a trust in that Life in whom they live and move and have their being", but without the personal expression which a belief in Christ gives form to. It is in and by the power of that Life that they combat fear and selfishness in their efforts to love their neighbour and whose effects (its "welling up" or diminishing) ratify the truth of the actions which their consciences have led them to. Through their relationship to that Power (as Tolstoy's Levin experienced it) experienced as the source or "Life of their life", or a deep intuitive trust in the fabric of life itself, conscience guides and urges them on to fulfill their inner need for growth and happiness. Such a person lives within the mystery of existence, ever remaining

open to it, in spite of the fact that s/he cannot comprehend its full meaning.[5]

With the life enhancing aspect of these understandings of the two-fold commandment of "love", namely, altruism towards one neighbour and the trustful courage of openness to life's experiences in communion with the Source of one's life as our premises, we can carry on a dialogue with modern Man regardless of his beliefs, since the basis is now our common humanity and its search for meaningful living which engenders fulfillment and happiness.

We discussed the need for meaning in a person's life elsewhere (in the chapter on myth), where we examined it in a global sense of a larger framework in which to situate our daily actions. There we said that without a sense of meaning, the person often arrives at a juncture in life where they cease to make an effort to live. Spinelli, an existential-phenomenological psychologist sees the human being's need for meaning as inherent in human nature:

> Our need to make things meaningful (by defining, or distinguishing, or 'bounding' them) appears to be another "given" of our species. Our intolerance of meaninglessness seems to be deep-rooted, even fundamental, to our make-up.[6]

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[5] Not that the believer understands the full meaning either, but finds reassurance through faith which is gradually proved through the ratification of experience, or if this does not happen the person must reject his "belief system", in order to unify his existence in honesty to self.

[6] Ernesto Spinelli. "The Existential-Phenomenological Paradigm" in Handbook of Counselling Psychology, ed. R. Woolfe and W. Dryden (London: Sage Publication, 1996) p. 184.

He is speaking of our need to make sense out of, and thus integrate our daily actions into a meaningful whole, and this is the great emphasis of Victor Frankl's Logotherapy, which we discuss below. Because of this need for meaning, the human being sifts, so to speak, his or her daily experiences for meaningfulness, constantly evaluating whether or not his goal or behaviour is "worth it", that is, does the effort put into it fulfill the inner need for happiness. If not, it is rejected and another is tried. If nothing in life seems "worth it", if life is experienced as meaningless, the person either ends his life by suicide or neglect, or, sometimes dulls his senses with drugs, or this existential crisis becomes the impetus to courageously seek beyond one's present world view. For this, trust in either someone or something other than oneself is necessary, for it enables the person to transcend themselves: to go beyond what their self says is safe, since their safety is now trusted to the person or thing (God or His Life-giving presence) which they have entrusted themselves to. This creates the daring atmosphere of openness to experiential possibilities which could never be entered upon on their own. For the believer, this is God and any human agent he sends to bolster confidence in Him; for the non-believer, this is an undefined trust in the very fabric of the mystery which gives them life and which gives hope beyond all hope in their search.[7]

[7] The sensing of a hidden support within one's existential framework is exemplified in a dream Tolstoy had three years after writing A confession (1879), an account of his spiritual journey. He says that it occurred one night after he had been re-reading and thinking about this writing. In the dream he relates how he

In the following pages we will seek to explore such questions as: Are the worthwhile meanings discovered in human life the same for Christians and for non-believers? Is the way to attain these goals the same? If they are, then what can be learned

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found himself on a bed supported by rope cords which, as he tried to make himself more comfortable began to slip off until the lower half of his body was dangling. At this point he glances to see where he is. To his fear-filled astonishment, the bed is an unimaginable distance above the earth, in fact, he is up so high he can't make out anything below him or where this abyss ends. He is terrified and feels that if he looks down he will surely fall, yet, not to look down fills him with the even greater terror of imagining what will happen. He feels the last support slipping away and looks up. When he looks up he sees, there too, a huge abyss of sky. As he gazes upward, he tries to forget the abyss below and actually does. He finds that when he looks into the infinity above, his fears dispel. Then, "As happens in a dream, a voice says: 'take note of this, this is it!'" (p.79). He grows calmer and is able to recall the whole experience of how trying to make himself comfortable he shifted his position and the supports began to fall away and how he was saved from his terror by looking up. He says to himself "am I not still dangling here?", for he now feels fully supported. As he is thinking this he looks and sees that he is no longer dangling but is balanced securely on the last support. With this, he realizes that all along it was really only this one support that was holding him up. As he explores further he sees that the supporting rope is "ingenuously" suspended from a pillar at his head, itself with no seeming support, yet he has a certitude that "if one lies with the middle of one's body on the rope and looks up, there can be no question of falling." (p.80) He makes no further comment on the dream but the reader can't help interpreting it as a realization of God's support which had initially eluded him, yet, as all other supports fell away it became clear that amidst the two abysses (where we come from, where we are going, or any other appropriate interpretation) the one support is the Origin of the very mystery within which we find ourselves suspended; and the looking up to help elsewhere, instead of the looking down for a place to put our feet and support ourselves, is the only place from which peace instead of terror will be found. At the end of the dream a voice says to him "See that you remember." The dream, which was precipitated by the reading of his spiritual journey, seems to have been given to him simply as a trustful reminder of that Presence and Power which especially sustained him during that storm-tossed period of his life and which was still just as present. (p. 80) (Leo Tolstoy. Confessions and Other Writings, tr. by Jane Kentish; London: Penguin Books, 1987).

from psychology about the human being that will help him or her in their living out their relationship to God; and how can religion, if it can be identified with the same values and goals of humanity, offer itself to a modern world which has virtually rejected its claim of relevance? We will draw upon the writings of George MacDonald for insights.

Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic Psychology emerged in the 1950's offering an alternative to the pessimism and the determinism of the psychodynamic school. It is usually associated with such names as Rogers, Maslow, and Perls. Their theories are characterised as presenting a very positive view of human nature and a trust in that nature, which, if allowed the freedom to grow and is properly nurtured, will result in a "fully functioning person" characterised as creative, caring, responsible, altruistic and genuinely happy. Their theories have been criticised as offering a too positive view of human nature given the sordid history of mankind. Their evaluation of human nature is at the opposite pole of Freud's, who characterised Man in extremely unflattering terms:

> Men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him. Man is a wolf to man. Who, in

> the face of all his experience of life and of history, will have the courage to dispute this assertion?[8]

The humanistic psychologists' contrasting view is summed up in what Abraham Maslow says of human nature:

> Each person's inner nature is in part unique to himself and in part species-wide.... This inner nature, as much as we know of it so far, seems not to be intrinsically or primarily or necessarily evil. The basic needs (for life, for safety and security, for belongingness and affection, for respect and self-respect, and for self-actualization), the basic human emotions and the basic human capacities are on their face value either neutral, pre-moral or positively "good". Destructiveness, sadism, cruelty, malice, etc., seem so far to be not intrinsic but rather seem to be violent reactions against frustration of our intrinsic needs, emotions and capacities.[9]

While Maslow's term the "self-actualized person" has been criticised by some Christian authors as a legitimization of selfishness (e.g., Wallach and Wallach in their book Psychology's Sanction for Selfishness: The error of egoism in theory and practice, San Francisco: W. Freeman and Co., 1983) and whose earlier presentation of the "self-actualized" person was criticised by the Existential Psychologist Victor Frankl, yet, Maslow makes clear in his later writings that this is not so. He explains that "self-actualized" people are not selfish, but rather are "altruistic, dedicated, self-transcending,

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[8] Sigmund Freud. Civilisation and Its Discontents, 1930, translated and edited by James Strachy (New York: Norton, 1961) quoted from Psychology by Hockenbury and Hockenbury (New York: Worth Publishers, 1997) p. 490.

[9] Abraham Maslow. Toward a Psychology of Being 2nd ed., New York: Van Nostrant Reinhold Co., 1968) p. 3.

social, etc."[10] And while a theologian might argue that Maslow's view of human nature doesn't take into account the effects of Original sin and is hence, overly optimistic, the goals of the individual seeking to become "self-actualized" are no different from the goals of those seeking Christian perfection.

For the means to attain these goals, and for a restatement of them in his own words, we would like to shift our attention to Carl Rogers (d. 1987). Carl R. Rogers was the founder of the "client-centred" or "person-centred" approach to pychological counselling, that is, he emphasised the need of the counsellor to be with the person rather than the traditional approach of doctor-patient, where the patient is passive and the doctor does something to the patient or has the answers. By being with the patient, the counsellor seeks to create a "helping relationship" through which the client gains the strength and freedom to respond to and allow the inner growth of his/her self.

He developed this in the late 1950's and early 1960's and although new types of counselling therapies have emerged, "the

[10] Ibid. Preface to first edition, p.vi. It should also be noted that Maslow has been criticised as being a speculative psychologist without enough evidence for his conclusions. In one of his studies he chose a small number (less than twenty) of individuals whom he admired as exhibiting the qualities which he identified the "self-actualized person". This is not a vast number for research, however, one of the problems with gathering greater evidence in this area is that there are so few "self-actualized persons" around; just as in religion there are so few "saints". As Spinoza wrote at the end of his Ethics: "Sed omnia praeclara tam difficilia quam rara sunt" (but everything great is just as difficult to realize as it is rare to find). (Quoted from Man's Search for Meaning by Victor Frankl "The case for a tragic optimism", p. 179.)

importance of a helping relationship as a significant variable in working with people in various professions: mental health, social work, and the medical profession is now an established principle."[11] Another lasting contribution Rogers has made to psychology has been the importance of the "self-concept" as "a dynamic mental structure that interprets and mediates many intrapersonal and interpersonal processes (social perception, social choices)".[12]

His approach to helping someone can only be described as a "Christ-like giving of self". And he felt that only through a real giving of self to the client, could any lasting results be achieved.

The following quotations describe his thinking and method:

> in my early professional years I was asking the question, How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question in this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may

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[11] Handbook of Counselling Psychology, opus cit., p. .5

[12] Philip Zimbardo. Psychology and Life 12th edition, (USA: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988) pp. 445-446.

In a recent "critical biography" of Carl Rogers, the author says of Rogers that his contribution has been "more on counselling practice than on psychological theory....Rogers' philosophy -- listen to the client, treat him or her with respect, use empathy, try to get the client to find his or her own solutions-- has become a part of the fabric of therapy" (p. 235).

"He helped popularise the idea that therapy was not just for the 'sick' but that it could help anyone to be happier and find his or her real self....Despite his many and very human failures, therefore, he remains one of the most important pychologists of the twentieth century." (P. 236) (Carl Rogers: A Critical Biography by David Cohen; London: Constable Press, 1997),

use for his own personal growth?[13]

Concerning different training methods for counsellors and therapists, he says that those approaches which depend for:

> knowledge upon training, upon the acceptance of something that is "taught", is of no use. These approaches seem so tempting and direct that I have, in the past tried a great many of them. It is possible to explain a person to himself, to prescribe steps which should lead him forward, to train him in knowledge about a more satisfying life. But such methods are, in my experience, futile and inconsequential. The most they can accomplish is some temporary change, which soon disappears, leaving the individual more than ever convinced of his inadequacy.[14]

The following characteristics constitute a helping relationship for Rogers:

1) genuineness (also called congruence): "Being genuine involves the willingness to be and to express, in my words and by behaviour, the various feelings and attitudes which exist in me. It is only in this way that the relationship can have reality....It is only by providing genuine reality which is in me, that the other person can successfully seek the reality in him[self]. I have found this to be true even when the attitudes I feel are not attitudes with which I am pleased."[15]

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[13] Carl Rogers. On becoming a Person, (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1961) p. 31.

[14] Ibid. pp. 32-33.

[15] Ibid. p. 33. Note the similarity here between a statement by Ludwig Binswanger, one of the founders of Existential Psychology: "Certainly it not always is true to the facts if one attributes the failure of treatment only to the patient; the question always to be asked first by the physician is whether the fault may not be his. What is meant here is not any technical fault but the more fundamental failure that consists of an impotence to wake or rekindle that divine "spark" in the patient which only true communication from existence to existence can bring forth and which alone possesses, with its light and warmth, also the fundamental power that makes any therapy work - the power to liberate a person from the blind isolation, the idios kosmos of Heraclitus, from a mere vegetating in his body, his dreams, his private wishes, his conceit and his presumptions, and to ready him for a life of koinia, of genuine community." ("Uber Psychotherapie" quoted by Rollo May in Existence, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958, p. 81; who in turn quotes it from U. Sonnemann, in Existence and Therapy New York: Grune and

2) acceptance: which has been termed "unconditional positive regard": that is "a warm regard for him as a person of unconditional self-worth - of value no matter what his condition, his behaviour, or his feelings. It means a respect and liking for him as a separate person, a willingness for him to possess his own feelings in his own way. It means an acceptance and regard for his attitude of the moment, no matter how they may contradict other attitudes he has held in the past. This acceptance of each fluctuating aspect of this other person makes it for him a relationship of warmth and safety, and the safety of being liked and prized as a person seems a highly important element in a helping relationship."[16]

3) empathy: a desire to understand the feelings and thoughts of the person, see them and feel them as s/he does and to accept them and the person; and when this is done the person feels "really free to explore all the hidden nooks and frightening crannies of [his or her]...inner and often buried experience. This freedom is an important condition of the relationship....There is also a complete freedom from any type of moral diagnostic evaluation,...since all evaluations are, I believe, always threatening."[17] [If you really understand the person's feelings and thoughts you can accompany them, giving them support and courage along the way.]

These three relational conditions create an atmosphere of security within which exploration can take place:

> When these conditions are achieved, I become a companion to my client, accompanying him in the frightening search for himself, which he now feels free to undertake...,[however] even when I have achieved it in myself.[18]

The motivation for change is within the person "Whether one calls it a growth tendency, a drive toward self-actualization, or a forward-moving directional tendency, it is the mainspring

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Stratton, 1954, p. 345.

[16] Carl Rogers On Becoming a Person, opus cit. p. 34.

[17] Ibid. "empathy", that is, a closer and more sympathetic relationship than compassion, seeks to understand the person's world as they themselves do. Although not a new idea, it is something that has its restatement in Phenomenology.

[18] Ibid. p. 35.

of life, and is in the last analysis, the tendency upon which all psychotherapy depends. It is the urge which is evident in all organic and human life - the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism, to the extent that such activation enhances the organism of the self."[19]

The relationship provides the ambience for the person to get behind encrusted layers of psychological defenses and facades, especially and necessarily, those which deny the existence of this growth principle. Rogers' experience has been that when the person takes advantage of this ambience, "constructive growth will invariably occur."[20]

Type of growth achieved

He characterises the growth that is achieved as follows:

> "[s/he] will experience and understand aspects of himself which previously he has repressed; will find himself better integrated, more able to function effectively; will become more similar to the person he would like to be, will be more self-directing and self-confident, will become more of a person, more unique and more self-expressive; will be able to cope with the problems of life more adequately and more comfortably."[21]

He believed that a broad hypothesis can be made about every human relationship: parent-child; teacher-student; administrator-worker. The result being: (parent-child) "a more self-directing, mature, socialized individual"; (teacher-

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid. p. 38.

student) "self-initiated learner, more original, more self-disciplined, less anxious and other-directed"; (administrator-worker) "more self-responsible, more creative, better able to adapt to new problems, more basically co-operative".[22]

The helping relationship of a trustworthy accepting friend is precisely what God ought to be perceived as if a complete entrustment of the fragile and vulnerable human psyche is to be made to Him; and likewise the friendship which a Rogerian counsellor is to offer is an embodiment of the commandment to love as Jesus loved us. The person who already "trusts in the Source of Life", acting out of an attitude of benevolent love for their neighbour, transmits or communicates that trust, embodying it in their relation to the one in need so that s/he may emerge from their fears and grow.[23]

Obstacles to growth - a mistrust of God

One of the major sources of obstacles to a person's "trust in the Source of Life" has been from theology, and religions which have adopted a theology, which views God's relation to, and

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[22] Ibid. p. 37.

[23] We have tried to give some idea of what we mean by a "trust in life" both through Tolstoy's dream (footnote 7 above), and what we said earlier; however, fear is such a subtle companion to the finite and fragile human being and the communication of trust to a person in areas of their life where only risk is perceived is such a mystery, and yet such a necessity, that it becomes a central theme to human growth. We address some of the deformities which fear engenders in the individual in the next chapter with regard to envy and pride with the hope of shedding more light on this obstacle to human growth.

plans for, Man in a way which puts His goodness in question -- which portrays a god of conditional love. We would like to offer here some excerpts from two novels of George MacDonald in which he illustrates the effects that our perception of God can have in regard to human growth.

The Effects of a Mis-Perception of God

In George MacDonald's novel Alec Forbes (1867), we are presented with the character of Annie Anderson. She is a young girl, innocent and honest, about 9 or 10 years old. Her mother had died when she was quite young, and the novel opens at the funeral of her father. With her father's death she is sent to live with relatives in the town of Howglen. We get a small glimpse of her relationship with God the first night she spends at her new home. She is led up to a small garret room, her new bedroom, which is full of nooks and crannies, and various holes in the floorboards. She is left without a candle. A few minutes after she gets into bed she hears noises, scurrying noises, the sounds of rats, and she is terrified. She calls out to God for help, and to her delighted surprise, the door opens a crack and she glimpses the house cat entering, certainly sent by God in answer to her prayers.

In the town of Howglen, she soon comes in contact with two influences which become for a time intertwined with her perception of God. One is the very fervent Missionar Kirk and the other is the schoolmaster, Murdoch Malison (whom the students have nicknamed "Murder Malison" because of his extreme

use of corporal punishment). MacDonald sees him as depicting the typical schoolmaster of the time in his part of Scotland, and indeed he attributed the premature death of one of his own brothers to the cruel treatment the boy had received from their schoolmaster in Huntly. But, to continue, he describes such a schoolmaster as follows:

> There is not to be found a more thorough impersonation of his own theology than a Scotch schoolmaster of the rough old-fashioned type. His pleasure was law, irrespective of right or wrong, and the reward of submission to law was immunity from punishment. He had his favourites in various degrees, whom he chose according to inexplicable directions of feeling ratified by "the freedom of his own will". These found it easy to please him, while those with whom he was not primarily pleased, found it impossible to please him.[24]

With regard to the Missionar Kirk, Annie has heard good things about it - its fervour, its seriousness. Anyway, she decides to go and see for herself. The evening she goes the minister is a Mr. Brown. MacDonald describes him as follows:

> a thin-faced cadaverous man, with a self-severe saintly look, one to whom religion was clearly a reality, though not so clearly a gladness, one whose opinions -vague half-monstrous embodiments of truth- helped to give him a consciousness of the life which sprung from a source far deeper than his consciousness could reach.[25]

The first reading that evening was taken from "a terrible chapter of denunciation out of the prophet Isiah"[26]. This was to

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[24] George MacDonald. Alec Forbes of Howglen (1867) (London: Hurst and Blackett, Ltd., no date) ch. 27 (p.117).

[25] Ibid. ch. 26 (pp. 113-114).

[26] Ibid. ch. 26 (p. 113).

get them into the mood for the sermon. It was based on the words of the psalmist: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."

MacDonald tells us that:

> His sermon consisted simply of answers to two questions: "Who are the wicked?" and "What is their fate?" The answer to the former question was "The wicked are those that forget God"; the answer to the latter, "The torments of everlasting fire."[27]

Now Annie is presented by MacDonald as a Christ-like child, however, he says:

> the sermon produced the immediate conviction that she was one of the wicked, and that she was in danger of hell-fire...[when the service was over] she crept out into the dark street as if it were the Outer Darkness....[when home in her garret bedroom] the feeling came over her that it was no longer against rats, nor yet against evil things dwelling in the holes and corners of a neglected human world, that she had to pray. A spiritual terror was seated on the throne of the universe, and was called God --and to whom should she pray against it? Amidst the darkness a deeper darkness fell.[28]

That night, when she heard sounds in the darkness a new sensation came over her, a feeling that "she was exposed to all the rats in the universe now, for God was angry with her"[29]. She tried to pray but couldn't, and this simply confirmed for her that she was a person who forgets God, for hadn't she often her mind on other things.

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[27] Ibid. p. 114.

[28] Ibid. pp. 115-116.

[29] Ibid. p. 116.

The next day at school Murdoch Malison had thrown the tawse at her for being sleepy and commanded her to stand on her chair for the remainder of the day. On top of the embarrassment she felt from this, it provided her with an unimpeded view of the cruelty that would follow. A thin small boy struck a classmate in the face and the schoolmaster, upon seeing this, grabbed him, didn't ask for any explanation, immediately placed the boy's head between his knees and began lashing his back with the tawse. The boy turned his head a bit sideways and bit the master's leg, who now became so enraged that he lifted the boy and crashed him to the ground, knocking him unconscious! Witnessing all of this, MacDonald tells us of Annie that:

> The feeling that God was angry with her grew upon her; and Murdoch Malison became for a time inseparably associated with her idea of God, frightfully bewildering all her aspirations.[30]

When a friend tries to console her after school her mood is described as a prevailing sense of condemnation which seems to be a check on her very desire to live and grow:

> such was her sense of condemnation that she dared not take pleasure in anything. Nothing else was worth minding till something was done about that. The thought of having God against her took the heart out of everything....To know she could not be near God in peace and love without fulfilling certain mental conditions --that he would not have her just as she was now, filled her with an undefined but terribly real misery, only the more distressing that it was vague with the vagueness of the dismal negation from which it sprung [i.e. such a terrible God at the core of the universe]. It was not, however, the strength of her love to God that made her unhappy in being thus barred out from him. It was rather the check thus given to the whole upward tendency of her being, with

[30] Ibid. ch. 27 (p. 120).

> its multitude of undefined hopes and longings now drawing nigh to birth.[31]

It is this "undefined" ambience of a lack of goodness and understanding in Him in whom "we live and move and have our being" that MacDonald is pointing to which literally stunts human development. It should also be noted that this passage speaks of a "conditional love" --"that he would not have her just as she is now", the opposite to the unconditional positive regard which Carl Rogers advocates for human growth and development.

In his novel Castle Warlock (1882), MacDonald expresses the effects of teachings about God and his relation to his creation which bespeak a goodness and caring which frees and enlarges the human spirit enabling one to completely trust and surrender to such a God, and providing an ambience which fosters growth. Cosmo Warlock is a boy about 14 years of age whose mother died when he was 4 or 5 and who lives with his father who is a good and loving man.

An existential crisis ensues when Cosmo's mare Linty is sick and close to death. He loves the mare and is very distressed at her condition. When he shows up at his tutor's home for lessons, the man can't help but notice the boy's distress and questions him about it. The boy was especially sad because he was under the impression, for it was common teaching, that God does not provide for animals at their death and they simply pass into

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[31] Ibid.

oblivion. His tutor's heart is moved at the boy's distress and he shares with him what he thinks on the subject:

> folk may tell me....at I sud content mysel' and lat alane sic useless speculation, but wi' deein men an' mears a' aboot, how can I!
>
> There's no a word o'the kin' i' the haill Bible, nor i' the hert o' man - nor i' the hert o' the Maker, do I, i' the hert o' me, believe....That a thing can love an' be loved - an' that's yer bonnie mearie, Cosmo - is a' ane to sayin' at it's immortal; for God is love, an' whatever partakes o' the essence o' God canna dee, but maun gang on livin' til it please him to say haud, an' that he'll never say...[32]

The effects on the boy are that of liberation:

> The possible entrance of Linty upon an enlarged existence widened the whole heaven of his conscious being; the well-spring of personal life within himself seemed to rush forth in mightier volume; and through that grief and its consolation, the boy made a great stride towards manhood.[33]

In this case, as in contrast to the case of Annie Anderson, the doctrine about God is of an indirect kind. Yet, one which bespeaks a God of all goodness - a God whose love invites trust and hence fosters growth. We do not see how a person can fulfill the commandment to love God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength without an understanding of God's love as "unconditional". For to entrust oneself completely, without reservations, requires a confidence in God which admits no question as to his trustworthiness and his goodness.

MacDonald tried to convey to his readers his own trust in God

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[32] George Macdonald. Castle Warlock, (Whitehorn, California: Johannesen Publishing Co., 1991 reprint of 1890 edition of Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Comp., London) pp. 61-62

[33] Ibid. p. 62.

and to correct, so to speak, misrepresentations of the God he had come to know and love. This, combined with his understanding of human nature and its needs, resulted in a theological anthropology of a very modern kind. With regard to human development and the growth toward Christian perfection that is promoted by such an understanding of God there is practically speaking, no difference between his and the type of growth which Carl Rogers sees as the outcome of humanistic counselling. In a later book Freedom to Learn for the Eighties Rogers sets forth the optimum characteristics of growth that the helping relationship fosters and the goal of such growth in great detail.[34] It involves three interrelated areas of experience:

1) First and foremost the relationship fosters openness to experience:

> It is the polar opposite to defensiveness....[which] is the organism's response to experiences that are perceived or anticipated as incongruent with the structure of the self. In order to maintain self-structure, such experiences are given a distorted symbolization in awareness, that reduces incongruity.[35]

2) The person lives in an existential manner. He explains it thus:

> for the person who was fully open to his experience, completely without defensiveness, each moment would

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[34] Although his concern in this book is education, he feels the goal of education (either at home or in school or university) and the goal of psychotherapy are the same - to develop the best possible human being.

[35] C. Rogers. Freedom to Learn for the Eighties, (Columbus, Ohio: C.E. Merril Publishing Co., 1983) pp. 285-286. The "incongruity" which he is speaking of is the new understanding of self which threatens the present understanding of self.

> be new....the self and personality would emerge from experience rather than experience being translated or twisted to fit a preconceived self-structure. It means that one becomes a participant in and an observer of the ongoing process of organismic experience, rather than being in control of it.[36]

3) Finally, from this living in the present moment the person would:

> find his organism a trustworthy means of arriving at the most satisfying behavior in each existential situation....He finds himself moving in a certain direction long before he can give any completely conscious and rational basis for it.[37]

Rogers describes a person with the above characteristics at their optimum as a "fully functioning person". That is, a person whose organism is fully functioning and the person's conscious awareness of this as he lives freely in the reality within and outside of himself.

Some may argue that human nature is not so trustworthy.[38] Yet

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[36] Ibid. p. 288. Here is another tenet of Existential therapy, i.e., intrapsychic openness.

[37] Ibid. pp. 289-290.

[38] Certainly, Rogers has been criticised for this. The criticisms generally come from two perspectives. First, varying degrees of emphasis on one or another aspect of the data concerning human nature, depending upon one's own temperament and life experiences, e.g., the contrasting views of Freud and Maslow in regard to human nature as cited above; secondly, misunderstandings in terminology, preconceptions, assumptions and usage of terms, etc., e.g., the misunderstandings between Rogers and Reinhold Niebuhr over Niebuhr's book The Self and the Drama of History. Rogers wrote a rather scathing review of it. Niebuhr understood sin or human brokeness as rooted in self-love or pride, whereas Rogers' own clinical experience had located the brokenness in a lack of self-esteem, a lack of self-love. However, Niebuhr was working from a position of assuming a sufficient amount of self-love to begin with and Rogers had misunderstood this.

Don Browning criticizes Rogers for what he feels is an over-simplification of the human growth process, which in turn leads

Rogers' conclusions are that a fully functioning person's behaviour is both constructive and trustworthy:

> For me this is an inescapable conclusion from more than forty years of clinical experience in psychotherapy. When we are able to free the individual from defensiveness, so that he is open to a wide range of his own needs, as well as the wide range of environmental and social demands, his reaction may be trusted to be positive, forward-moving, constructive. We do not need to ask who will socialize him, for one of his own deepest needs is for affiliation with and communication with others.[39]

For Rogers, then and his type of Humanistic Psychology, we see not only a non-contradiction of the Great Commandments, but a beautiful incarnation of them. Perhaps the one thing about Rogerian counselling which seems to put off some counsellors or make them uncomfortable is that this type of counselling requires a giving of self that is often very taxing. It actually requires a self-sacrificing love of neighbour.

Existential Psychology

Our comments on Existential Psychology as a whole will be as brief as possible since many of its principles were adopted by, and are embodied in Carl Rogers' "person centred" approach to counselling. As a school, it grew out of Existential philosophy (itself a branch of Phenomenology founded by Husserl) in that some psychologists began using these new philosophical concepts

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to being overly optimistic. There is some truth in this and perhaps could be explained by the fact that Rogers was dealing with people who came to him already seeking help to change and whose principle obstacles to change were due to fear rather than selfishness.

[39] Freedom to Learn from the Eighties. opus cit., p. 292.

as tools for psychiatric investigation. From the philosophical school some of the chief proponents would be Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers, and Sartre. From the psychological school we encounter such names as Eugene Minkowski, Erwin Strauss, and von Gebsattel, who represent the first stage or phenomenological stage of the movement; and Binswanger, Storch, Boss, Bally, Kuhn, May, Ellenberger, Spinelli, and others representing the existential school. It is a movement that refuses to allow Man to be reduced, by a technological reduction, to a set of mechanistic theories which depersonalise and nullify his/her freedom. Rollo May expresses this when he says:

> It is precisely the movement that protests against the tendency to identify psychotherapy with technical reason [as opposed to the reason of the heart]. It stands for basing psychotherapy on an understanding of what makes man the "human" being.[40]

The Existential or Existential-Phenomenological School of Psychology, as it is sometimes termed, is said to differ from the Humanistic School of Psychology by not only "being with" the client as the Rogerians do, but also "being for" the client. Whereas Rogers' therapy is non-directive, i.e. the therapist supports but does not guide the client as Rogers felt this would not have lasting results, existential therapists would, by being "for" the client express "their own input to the relationship via descriptively focused interpretations that seek to clarify and challenge both the overt and tacit meanings and assumptions suggested within clients' statements so that their significance

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[40] Existence: A new Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology, edited by Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F. Ellenberger (New York: Touchstone book, Simon and Schuster, 1958) p. 35.

to and implications for the client's lived reality can be disclosed and considered."[41] They, also, do not limit themselves to neurotic illnesses but go further than humanists, often dealing with severely disturbed people. They have done much to shed light on the deeply subjective worlds within which psychotic patients live, especially the spatial and temporal aspects of these worlds, bringing greater understanding and insight to bear in their treatment. They often use psychoanalytic techniques, but without the pre-supposed emphasis on symbolization which the Freudians hold.

Their goal, just as the humanistic psychologists, is to free the individual from sedimented attitudes that constrict and inhibit his/her openness to the world within - intrapsychic, and the world without - interpsychic, and in so doing create an authentic individual who confronts reality with courage. The "price" of this freedom and authenticity is "angst", that is, the awareness of our independence or aloneness and the responsibility that we personally have in the face of freedom. It is something that many people find too frightening and avoid.[42] But to do this you must de-humanize yourself, by becoming "passive, irresponsible, seemingly determined by the will and whim of others, and seek out the security of external

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[41] Ernesto Spinelli. "The Existential Paradigm" in Handbook of Counselling Psychology, opus cit., p. 192.

[42] In his novel, The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky presents a marvellous discussion on human freedom and its avoidance in the chapter on "The Grand Inquisitor" where Christ is interrogated concerning the real wisdom of the three-fold temptation in the desert and how he erred in insisting in the freedom of his followers which they don't really want.

truth, permanent meanings, statements from on high."[43]

Neither school seeks to opiate their clients when faced with crises of existential unhappiness, but rather see these crises as opportunities (granted, painful ones) to help them to live at an increased awareness - a higher quality of life, both on a personal and interpersonal level. They, therefore, view such crises as positive signs of the human condition calling forth growth. Kierkegaard prophetically expressed this need for crises in his Concluding Unscientific Postscript:

> So there I sat and smoked my cigar until I lapsed into thought. Among other thoughts I remember these: "You are going on," I said to myself, "to become an old man, without being anything, and without really undertaking to do anything. On the other hand, wherever you look about you, in literature and in life, you see the celebrated names and figures, the precious and much heralded men who are coming into prominence and are much talked about, the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit mankind by making life easier and easier, some by railways, others by omnibuses and steamboats, others by the telegraph, others by easily comprehended compendiums and short recitals of everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who make spiritual existence in virtue of thought easier and easier, yet more and more significant. And what are you doing?" Here my soliloquy was interrupted, for my cigar was smoked out and a new one had to be lit. So I smoked again, and then suddenly this thought flashed through my mind: "you must do something, but inasmuch as with your limited capacities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others, undertake to make something harder." This notion pleased me immensely, and at the same time it flattered me to think that I, like the rest of them, would be loved and esteemed by the whole community. For when all combine in every way to make everything easier, there remains only one possible danger, namely, that the ease becomes so great that it becomes altogether too great; then there is only one want

[43] Ernesto Spinelli. "The Existential-Phenomenological Paradigm", opus cit., p. 184.

> left, though it is not yet a felt want, when people will want difficulty. Out of love for mankind and out of despair at my embarrassing situation, seeing that I had accomplished nothing and was unable to make anything easier than it had already been made, and moved by a genuine interest in those who make everything easy, I conceived it my task to create difficulties everywhere.[44]

With the Rogerians, the existential school identified existential crises only as pathologies in the sense that the natural condition of Man has been interrupted, self-estrangement has taken place which has cut him/her off from the potentials of his/her own being; and they seek to restore the person's intrapsychic health. As this is restored the person's world changes from the abstract mental images of a self-protective world into the concrete of lived experience and the true emotions which those experiences elicit. To the degree that the person is able to genuinely experience his/her actual world, to that degree can s/he experience the world of other people[45]. Following upon this happening, the capability for genuine interpersonal communion takes place. Without the restoration of intrapsychic health, there can be no genuine interpersonal communion, no love of neighbour.

It is in the understanding of the above principle about an illness of modern man, the healing of which is a sine qua non to interpersonal love, that the criticisms of this and

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[44] Soren Kierkegaard. Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. by David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1941) pp. 68f. quoted from Existential Man by Richard E. Johnson(New York: Pergamon Press, 1971) pp. 13-14.

[45] This, of course, pre-supposes that everyone only possesses a subjective slice of reality; but the goal is to experience that "slice" with openness.

Humanistic Psychology, as advocating selfishness are answered. And, as to the emerging self in its relation to others, perhaps stated "but what then is the controlling mechanism, if not God or religion, that balances self-concern for fulfilment and one's neighbours rights and needs?" The answer to this is a metaphysical reality of the "human" - the inescapable happening of being **moved to pity,** like the good Samaritan, at your neighbours hurt. It is this interpersonal reality which governs the equitable relationship with one's neighbour. And the person who has achieved authenticity with him/herself can't help but apply the same meaningful values which s/he holds most dear to her neighbour as a co-natural fact .

Logotherapy: A meaning centred psychology.

Logotherapy is a school of Existential Psychology which focuses on the human beings' need to search for and find a meaning in his or her own unique and concrete existence. It was founded by the Viennese psychiatrist Victor Frankl (d. 1997) and is often referred to as the "Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy (Freud's and Adler's being the first two respectively). Frankl spent three years in the brutality of Nazi concentration camps where his wife, his mother, his father and brother died. He speaks with a wisdom about human nature which has been described as "rest[ing] on experiences too deep for deception."[46] Although belonging to the Existential School of Psychology, his

[46] Gordon W. Allport, from his Preface to the first edition of Man's Search for Meaning revised and updated edition by Victor Frankl (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984) p.10.

speciality picks up, so to speak, where existential analysis has already done the groundwork, that is, with people relatively in touch with their inner selves.[47] He deals with those who experience their lives as meaningless and has identified a particular problem of the Twentieth Century which he has termed "Existential Frustration". He locates the realm of this problem in the spiritual dimension of the person and although this "existential frustration" can lead to neuroses, he says of it:

> Existential frustration is in itself neither pathological nor pathogenic. A man's concern, even his despair, over the worthwhileness of life is an **existential distress** but by no means a **mental disease.** It may well be that interpreting the first in terms of the latter motivates a doctor to bury his patient's existential despair under a heap of tranquilizing drugs. It is his task, rather, to pilot the patient through his existential crisis of growth and development.
>
> Logotherapy regards its assignment as assisting the patient to find meaning in his life.[48]

Underlying Theory

The theory underlying the practice of Logotherapy is composed of three interconnected assumptions:

1) Freedom of will.

Frankl believes that there are only two classes of people that maintain that there is no freedom: schizophrenics suffering from delusions, and deterministic philosophers or behaviourists. For Frankl, human freedom, although limited by the biological,

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[47] It is because he is dealing with people who are relatively healthy, that is, those that are not in need of existential analysis and therefore can grow, that we feel we can make helpful comparisons between Frankl and Macdonald.

[48] Victor Frankl. Man's Search for Meaning, revised and updated, (New York: Washington Square Press 1984) p.125.

psychological, and social spheres is nevertheless real and can be seen to be active by way of the attitude or stand we take, even when there seems as if we have no choices, e.g., when faced with a terminal illness, we still have a freedom to decide with what attitude we will meet the situation.

The place of this freedom Frankl locates in the spiritual dimension of Man, what he calls the noological (to distinguish it from religious connotations). It is in this dimension where self-consciousness and conscience are located and hence it is here that Man can judge his own actions and even take a stand against himself. "Self-consciousness and conscience would not be understandable unless we interpret man in terms of a being capable of detaching himself from himself, leaving the plane of the biological and psychological, passing into the space of the noological"[49]

2) The will to meaning.

For Frankl the underlying motivating force in Man is his "will to meaning"[50] that is, his need to search out and discover meanings in his/her concrete and unique daily existence. As s/he discovers meanings and fulfills them the person finds

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[49] Victor Frankl. Psychotherapy and Existentialism: Selected papers on Logotherapy, (London: Souvenir Press 1970) p. 3. Frankl also places the "sense of humour" in this dimension which comes prominently into play in the logotherapeutic technique of "paradoxical intention".

[50] The "will to meaning", although initially criticized as simply a philosophical idea rather than a psychological position with evidence, has come to be recognised as a genuine human need.

satisfaction and happiness in life. The discovery of meanings also involves the discovery of values and a real sense of what it means to be human. The two previous Viennese Schools identified Man's motivating force as "the will to pleasure", Freud; and "the will to power", Adler. Frankl sees these as rather derivatives of "the will to meaning". He believes that the "will to pleasure" mistakes the effect for the end. That is, pleasure is really a by-product of the fulfilment of our strivings. It cannot be sought directly, but slips through our fingers when we go after it directly. He says that:

> happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensure. One must have a reason to " be happy". Once the reason is found, however, one becomes happy automatically... a human being is not one in pursuit of happiness but rather in seach of a reason to become happy...[51]

The "will to power", he feels, mistakes the means to an end as the end itself, where a certain amount of power, such as economic power, is generally a necessary prerequisite for meaning fulfilment.

When one discovers a meaning in the world, it carries with it an obligatory character which Frankl interprets as effecting a balance, so to speak, between the subjective self and the objective reality of those around us, and, of which, we are part. And these two shape one another, so that through our choices we create ourselves within the world.

The Logotherapist seeks to assist the client in finding or

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[51] Victor Frankl. Man's Search for Meaning opus cit., p.162.

discovering the meanings (not creating them) which s/he can respond to. He says that these meanings carry a quality of "the need to fulfill" and are always "ahead of one's being" such that they lead or set the pace, so to speak, for our becoming. As the sense of personal freedom grows, it challenges us i.e., "One meaning orientation turns into meaning confrontation, that stage of maturation and development is reached in which freedom - that concept so much emphasised by Existential Philosophy - becomes responsibleness. Man is responsible for the fulfillment of the specific meaning of his personal life. But he is also responsible before something, or to something, be it society, humanity or mankind, or his own conscience. Or to someone, to God."[52]

3) The meaning of life.

The discovery of meanings to fulfil is for Frankl like a chain of questions being asked to each unique individual in his/her own unique circumstances by life.[53] He explains how and where they are to be found.

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[52] Ibid p. 12.

[53] Frankl would sometimes ask patients who were suffering from a variety of miseries why they didn't take their own lives. From their answers he was able to find ways of helping them. For some the answer centred around the love of a spouse or children, for others a talent to be used. To one man whose life had lost all meaning when his wife died, Frankl put the question to him "How would your wife have managed if you had died first?" The man answered that she would have been devastated. To this, Frankl told him that his having survived her was saving her that distress. He went away feeling that his present suffering did have meaning and was a pledge for the love of his wife.

> In a phenomenological way, the logotherapist might widen and broaden the visual field of his patient in terms of meanings and values, making them loom large as it were. In the course of growing awareness it might then finally turn out that life never ceases to hold and retain a meaning to its last moment. This is due to the fact the phenomenological analysis can show us, man not only finds his life meaningful through deeds, his works, his creativity, but also through his experiences, his encounters with what is true, good and beautiful in the world, and last but not least, his encounter with others, with fellow human beings and their unique qualities. To grasp another person in his uniqueness means to love him. But even in this situation in which man is deprived of both creativity and receptivity, he can still fulfill meaning in his life. It is precisely when facing such a fate, when being confronted with a hopeless situation, that a man is given a last opportunity to fulfill a meaning - to realize even the highest value, to fulfill even the deepest meaning - and that is the meaning of suffering.[54]

Briefly stated then, it is through what we give to life, in terms of creative works; what we receive from life, in terms of values and the encounter of loving others; and through, the attitudinal stand we take toward a fate we cannot change, that the human being finds meaning. If we look at these loci of meaning, we see them all as referring to an inner source. The inner self with regard to creativity comes, i.e., from the living creating God who is the root of our being. With regard to the life-enhancing values of truth and goodness, and beauty, we are touching upon those transcendentals of being which have been described as the very attributes of the life of God - of Eternal Life. With regard to loving others we are dealing with that aspect of life which unites and enriches. Finally, with regard to a final attitudinal stance as an opportunity to fulfill "the highest value and the deepest meaning" we are

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[54] Ibid pp. 14-15.

dealing with the trust or entrustment to a deeper source of life while upholding those values which speak of self-sacrificing love and dignity. Interpreted in this way, we see Frankl's sources of meaning intrinsically and intimately associated with the two Great Commandments in a way which communicates life and helps reveal to Man more of the mystery of his or her existence.

The Tragic Triad

When Frankl speaks of the meaning of suffering, he often combines it with two other inescapable features of human existence that confront Man: guilt and death. He calls these three the "tragic triad" and seeks to discover how they can be meaningful and thus life-enriching.

Of guilt, he says that: "you are responsible for overcoming guilt by rising above it, by growing beyond yourself, by changing for the better." "Only in the face of guilt does it make sense to improve."[55] He also says of guilt that a person must face the fact that s/he is fallible and yet still live with this burden of freedom in which we can err.

Of death, he says: "It is the very transitoriness of human existence which constitutes man's responsibleness... If man were immortal, he would be justified in delaying everything; there would be no need to do anything right now". "Transitoriness is

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[55] Frankl. Man's Search for Meaning and Psychology and Existentialism, op. cit., pp. 174 and 30 respectively.

a reminder that challenges us to make the best possible use of each moment of our lives".[56] He also offers a bit of advice when faced with life's decisions and the need for courageous honesty to break free from imbedded cycles of behaviour:

> Live as if you were living for the second time and had acted as wrongly the first time as you are about to act now.[57]

With regard to suffering, he first qualifies it by saying that he is only speaking about unavoidable suffering (otherwise we are dealing with masochism). He then points out various values which are worth suffering for (those stated above in the first two areas of finding meaning). For example, he asks:

> Let anyone honestly ask himself whether he would be prepared to strike his unhappy love affairs, with all their self-doubt and suffering, out of the record of his life. Almost certainly he would not. The fullness of suffering did not seem to him lack of fulfillment. On the contrary, the suffering matured him; he grew as a result of it; his ill-fated love gave him more than many an erotic success might have given him.[58]

And he also points out that in a negative way suffering often makes us aware of what ought not to be, e.g., the pain of our guilt points out the actions we wrongly chose. But ultimately, he says that it supercedes, dimensionally, our capacity as finite beings to approach it through merely rational processes. However, it is:

> accessible to an act of commitment which emerges out of the depth and center of man's total existence. What we have to deal with is not an intellectual or rational process, but

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[56] Ibid. pp. 175 and 30 respectively.

[57] Victor Frankl. Man's Search for Meaning, opus cit., p. 175.

[58] Victor Frankl. The Doctor and the Soul, opus cit., p. 107.

> a wholly existential act which perhaps could be described by what I call Urvetrauen zum Dasein, "the basic trust in Being".[59]

This last expression is almost identical with how we translated the first great commandment -to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength- where we equated it with "a trust in the Source of Life".[60] With this, we seem to have come full circle. These writers speak of values and goals which, without referring to any outside commandments, speak of human growth and values identical to Biblical ones. They are simply discovering and living out the original gift of their nature.

What they seem to be saying is that each individual must discover for him/herself what satisfies, what brings happiness and that their inner nature directs this search or journey in a positive way for them and for society. The Existentialists teach us of a nature full of potential which once one gets in

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[59] Victor Frankl. Psychology and Existentialism, opus cit., p. 57.

[60] Some may be critical of equating the love of God with a simple "trust in the source of life" and see it as a reduction of the personal ethical God of the Bible, interpreting "trust" in such a way to simply mean a " basis of comfort" from which they can calmly seek themselves and take whatever life throws at them. Some clarification, then, is in order. Frankl's association of "a basic trust in Being" is revealed in relation to suffering. And Rogers' and the Existentialist Psychologists' clients are those who are in psychic pain and crisis. At that point they sense a need to go beyond themselves but are faced with fear. It is the fear of what might happen to them by trusting in their own conscience over and above family, peer, social or cultural pressure. So we are not speaking of the fear of getting caught satisfying one's own selfish needs at the expense of others, but of the fear of stepping out beyond supports of other human beings to be faithful to the deeper discerning trust of one's conscience interpreting the deepest needs of their inner being-something given to them by creation.

touch with brings health to the individual and concomitantly a vital link to his/her neighbour. Victor Frankl speaks of a world pregnant with meanings asking to be fulfilled, which interact upon our inner nature as living signposts to growth and happiness. The values and the worthwhile self-sacrifice for those values support the Christian revelation about Man.

Frankl, when he says that the person finds themselves "responsible before something, or to something, be it society, humanity, or mankind, or his own conscience. Or to someone, to God" expresses , on the one hand a relational need of the human being to his/her neighbour, and on the other hand a need to be responsible towards conscience or God. The point which interests us in this responsibility toward conscience (not the Freudian super-ego[61]), which bespeaks an inner self which in some manner guides the direction of our growth, which somehow already perceives deep in our subconscious a sense of what we are meant

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[61] "In humanistic belief, conscience differs somewhat from the punitive Freudian super-ego whose contents derive exclusively from the rules and expectations imposed by the environment, particularly expectations imposed by parents. Maslow proposed that in addition to values that the child ingests from people around her, her conscience also has a genetic source, a kind of intrinsic feeling or knowledge of the right thing to do. This faint voice has its beginnings in ancient human nature...It is an inner knowledge of one's true self. Maslow said that intrinsic guilt arises when an individual senses he has betrayed his own inner nature and had deviated from the path of self-actualization.
In Maslow's view, intrinsic guilt is a most desirable thing for it warns the child that she is straying from her true destiny. On the other hand, guilt based on unreasonable expectations from the environment is frequently non-constructive and detracts from the pursuit of one's identity and self-fulfillment." (Comparing Theories of Child Development, by R. Murray Thomas, Belmont, California: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1992, pp. 407-408.)
(see footnote 4 above for other definitions of "conscience".)

to ultimately be. It is, then, the voice of our "creator", so to speak - the voice of God, acting in a dynamic manner inseparable from the creating gift of our being - God in vital relationship hidden in the depths of the human being. Thus, the commandments to love God and to love our neighbour are not commandments at all, but rather the ultimate needs of the human being, by way of his/her ontology, for fulfillment.

Likewise Carl Rogers speaks of the fully functioning person "moving in a certain direction long before he can give any complete rational basis for it" - being guided, so to speak by an inner intuition. His Humanistic Psychology, through a "helping relationship", which is unconditionally accepting and non-judgemental, bespeaks a love of neighbour which fosters this revelation of the true self and could be seen as embodying the love of one's neighbour as spoken of by Christ in the Gospel.

These psychologies portray the human being as, above all, one who learns by personal experience and ultimately must move in a positive direction to be happy. Perhaps organised religion could learn to allow a much greater latitude to this learning process before putting labels on actions and have a much greater trust in the nature that God created. Perhaps it could also learn to focus more on the vital **on-going** relationship with God rather than end-products.

Likewise, perhaps religion could offer greater hope to those facing the "tragic-triad" of guilt, suffering, and death.

Victor Frankl offer a psychological insight into "the tragic triad" of human existence. We would like to look at some of George MacDonald's insights into these inescapable problems of human existence with the hope of presenting a differing viewpoint to theology and a more inviting hope for the person alienated by organised Christianity; and to those within organised Christianity who find some of the "received doctrines" a burden rather than a liberation. First, though, we would like to try to penetrate more deeply into the Commandment to love our neighbour as Christ loved us, with some reflections and insights from MacDonald's writings, for love is central to our theological questions.

Love of Neighbour for George MacDonald

Weighed and Wanting

Macdonald relates in his novel Weighed and Wanting a sense he had, from the time he was a child, of the solidarity of the human race, such that he could not help feeling that if God did not love everyone, he did not want to have such a God love him:

> I well remember feeling as a child that I did not care for God to love me if he did not love everybody: the kind of love I needed was love essential to my nature -the love of me, a man, not of me, a person- the love therefore that all men needed, the love that belonged to their nature as the children of the Father, a love he could not give me except he gave it to all men.[62]

It is this sense of the need for the universality of God's love toward humanity which underlies MacDonald's understanding of the love, the universal love, which we must have for our neighbour. We will look at how he develops this theme through the thoughts and feelings of the protagonist of this novel, Hester Raymount.

She is a young woman, perhaps in her early twenties and MacDonald says of her that she is "frank and true and generous" (p. 16). She grew up with her family in London where their house was situated in an old square in Bloomsbury. It was a neighbourhood surrounded on at least two sides by poor neighbours -"Artisans, small tradespeople, outdoor servants,

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[62] George MacDonald. Weighed and Wanting (1882) (London: Edwin Dalton, 1908) p. 20 (Ch. 3).

poor actors and actresses" (p.75). And MacDonald tells us that it was partially owing to having lived in this environment since childhood, that has awakened her to and helped her to become sympathetic to suffering humanity.

While on holiday with her family at an English seaside town she and her brother Cornelius take in some entertainment in a dingy hall near where Hester has twisted her ankle. They go in more to rest her ankle than to seek out the particular show which was a "magic lantern" presentation [a slide show] of a story called "The Pilgrim's Progress, The Rake's Progress".
The narrator was an "old man, like a broken-down clergyman, whose dirty white neckcloth seemed adjusted on a secret understanding of moral obliquity, its knot suggesting a gradual approach to the last position a knot on the neck can assume (p.17)....[and] smelled abominably of drink (p.19)". He was a "ruinous and wretched old man [who] did not merely seem to have taken to this [work] as a last effort, but to have in his dotage turned back upon his life-course, and resumed a half-forgotten trade [i.e., a clergyman]...to find that the faculty for it he once had ...had abondoned him" (p.19). This man's miserable state moved the heart of Hester. MacDonald tells us that she was especially distressed when, at the end of the show she noticed how poorly attended it was and that the man must be living in poverty and neglect. She "was all but crying to think she could do nothing for him" (p.19). When outside of the hall she raises her eyes heavenward and in a prayer of wondering concern expresses her perplexity at this man's pitiable state and of all

of suffering humanity:

> involuntarily Hester's eyes rose to the vault whose only keystone is the will of the Father, whose endless space alone is large enough to picture the heart of God: how was that old man to get up into the high regions, and grow clean and wise? For all the look, he must belong there as well as she! And were there not thousands equally and more miserable in the world - people wrapped in no tenderness, to whom none ministered, left if not driven- so it seemed at the moment to Hester -to fold themselves in their own selfishness? And was there nothing she, a favoured one of the family, could do to help, to comfort, to lift up one such of her own flesh and blood? -to rescue a heart from the misery of hopelessness? -to make this one or that feel there was a heart of love and refuge at the centre of things? Hester had a large, though not hitherto entirely active aspiration in her; and now, the moment she began to flutter her weak wings, she found the whole human family hanging upon her, and that she could not rise except in raising them along with her. For the necessities of our deepest nature are such as not to admit of a mere private individual satisfaction.[63]

This sense of compassion and solidarity with one's neighbour which MacDonald expresses through Hester, seems to us precisely what the Existential Psychologists describe as the concomitant effect of intrapsychic healing, that is, as the person is freed from the fears and blockages to his/her own contact with reality, s/he can't help but begin feeling for his/her neighbour. Contrasted to Hester's response is her brother Cornelius' mockery of, and compassionless reaction to the evening's events:

> How could you see anything pathetic, or pitiful as you call it, in that disreputable old humbug, I can't even imagine. A more ludicrous specimen of tumble-down humanity it would be impossible to find! A drunken old thief -I'll lay you anything! Catch me leaving a

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[63] Ibid. pp. 19-20.

sov[reign] where he could spy the shine of it![64]

She responds by asking him if that very state of misery is not pitiful when seen in a fellow human being, one with "heart and head and hands like yours" (p.21); and points out that she had even overheard the old man saying to himself that he was sick of it all, and she felt that he actually despised himself. To this, Cornelius employs such defense mechanisms as denial, rationalization, and projection in order not to feel anxious about the mans's predicament:

> What better or more just could he do [i.e., to despise himself]? But never you mind: **he's** all right! Don't you trouble your head about **him**. You should see him when he gets home! He'll have his hot supper and his hot tumbler, don't you fear! Swear he will too, and fluently, if it's not waiting him![65]

Cornelius concludes that he doesn't deserve pity because he has brought his misery upon himself. To this, Hester says that that is precisely why it is most pitiable:

> And is that not the lowest and worst of all? If he could not help it, and therefore was not to blame, it would be sad enough; but to be such, and be to blame for being such, seems to me misery upon misery unbearable.[66]

Here we feel MacDonald has arrived at the essence of what the Gospel Commandment means by loving one's neighbour as oneself. The very thing which tempts one not to have pity or compassion, that is, that the person has knowingly and willingly gotten

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[64] Ibid. p. 21

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid. p. 22.

themselves into their present predicament or state and is therefore receiving a just penalty, becomes the source of even greater compassion, for it perceives the self-destructive tragedy of the situation -the senseless sufferings of sin. We do not say the useless sufferings of sin, for it is precisely through the sufferings which are concomitant with or follow upon sin (the moral decay, the loss of inner peace and happiness, the realisation of hurt to others and oneself, and the pain of guilt that that brings) that we learn. But to not have compassion on someone's sufferings because these sufferings are the means to their arriving at health, is heartless or hardheartedness -is against the commandment to love. For it is compassion evoked by the suffering of another person which makes us attentive to how we might help. Sometimes that help may simply be in being with the other person, helping them to bear the necessary pain of change, or our attentiveness may reveal creative solutions. But above all, it unites us to one of our brothers or sisters in love, and offers hope and comfort.

Perhaps the chief cause of this hardheartedness is a protective response to having been the recipient of the pain caused to you, or to a loved one, by this perpetrator or a similar hurt caused by another. It is as if the victim were so fixed upon the desire that no such pain should ever be inflicted again that they lose sight of the sufferings the perpetrator must one day endure as he learns his lesson, and severs ties with them to one degree or another. This is what seems to have happened to Hester in regard to her brother.

She found his attitudes hurtful. MacDonald says of him that "No man was anything to him merely because he was a man."(p. 22). When Hester expresses to him that she would do anything to make the old man clean and comfortable, he responds with words which show that his way of relieving the world's suffering is to avoid adding to his own:

> for my part, I don't see the least occasion to trouble your head about such riff-raff. Every manufacture has its waste, and he's human waste. There's misery enough in the world without looking out for it, and taking other people's upon your shoulders.[67]

This attitude was "to her sisterly heart humiliating."(p. 22).

If Hester had been able to apply her argument about pitying those who from the world's point of view deserve no pity, to those closest to her, she would have had pity on her brother for his heartless attitude. Yet, because she was hurt by this very attitude she finds him a humiliation and distances herself from him and judges him.

As the novel progresses, her brother ends up stealing from the bank at which he is employed and drops out of sight. Although the family is able to cover most of the public humiliation by settling the account with the bank, whose manager is a relative, they feel as if a blotch has been placed on the family honour and this causes them upset and distress. Hester's father is indignant and never wants to see his son again, even if he should reappear. Her mother's health is affected by the whole strain of the affair for she loves her son dearly in spite of

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[67] Ibid.

everything, and Hester's own plans for marriage to a future earl are jeopardized by the scandal. But it is precisely in the face of all this family misery and most especially concern for the plight of her brother that she awakens, so to speak, and grows in understanding and realises that she had failed to pity, and so to be alert as how she could have helped her brother from falling so far; and she begins to accuse herself in her heart for her lack of love. This leads her to greater honesty about herself and how in other areas of her life she had failed the Gospel, even to the point of putting her Christian vocation in jeopardy by considering marrying someone unworthy of her for the sake of earthly renown. She sees that she too is a sinner in need of mercy.

> She dropped to her knees, and cried to her Father in heaven to make her heart clean altogether, to deliver her from any shadow of ill as thoroughly as she would have her brother repent of the stealing that made them all ashamed. Like a woman in the wrong she drew nigh the feet of her master; she too was a sinner; her heart needed his cleaning as much as any....
> for suddenly she perceived that self had been leading her astray: she was tender towards those farthest from her, hard towards the one nearer to her! It was easy to be indulgent toward those whose evil did not touch herself: to the son of her own mother she was severe and indignant! If she condemned him, who would help his mother to give him the love of which he stood in the sorer need that he was unworthy of it?....
>
> Presently the fact, which had at various times cast a dim presence up her horizon without thoroughly attracting her attention became plain to her -that she had in part been drawn toward her lover because of his social position....Clearly she must take her place with sinners![68]

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[68] Ibid. pp. 219-220. A similar awakening is noted in MacDonald's novel Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood (1867), where a father has been hard-hearted towards his daughter who became pregnant out of wedlock. He rejects her, and although he grows to love his new grandchild, he can neither forgive nor feel

She resolves not to leave London until she has found her brother and do all she can for him.

"Don't you trouble yourself about **him**!"

We must now look for the "why" of Cornelius' lack of compassion so as to better understand the obstacles to the commandment "to love your neighbour as yourself". MacDonald initially describes him as very immature and unformed, with ideas about his own virtue and vice that are far from having a base in reality. We are first introduced to him in a state of anger and frustration over the inclement weather during his holidays:

> A longish lad stood in the bow-window, leaning his head on the shutter, in a mood of smouldering rebellion against the order of things. He was such a mere creature of moods, that individual judgments of his character might well have proved irreconcilable. He had not yet begun by the use of his will - constantly indeed mistaking impulse for will- to blend the conflicting elements of his nature into one. He was therefore a man much as the mass of flour and raisins, etc., when first put into the bag, is a plum-pudding: and had to pass through something analogous

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compassion for his daughter for the embarrassment she has brought on the family. Only when he hears that his daughter Catherine has killed her son, and he goes to her home to find the boy hurt but alive and his daughter repentant, is he awakened to her misery and moved to pity for her: he sees expressed in act all his daughter's woundedness and hurt, something he was too proud and unforgiving to see before. "When Thomas came from his daughter's room, he looked like a man from whom the bitterness of evil had passed away. To human eyes, at least, it seemed as if self had been utterly slain in him. His face had that child-like expression in its paleness, and the tearfulness without tears haunting his eyes, which reminds one of the feeling of an evening in summer between which and the sultry day preceding it has fallen the gauzy veil of a cooling shower, with a rainbow in the east." (ch. 26, p. 456)

> to boiling to give him a chance of becoming worthy of the name he would have arrogated. But in his own estimate of himself he claimed always the virtues of whose presence he was conscious in his good moods, letting the bad ones slide, nor taking any account of what was in them. He substituted forgetfulness for repudiation, a return of good-humour for repentence, and at best a joke for apology.[69]

When his mother would gently rebuke him for his words or behaviour, he seemed unable to even understand the values she cared about and this, MacDonald says, "not from moral lack alone, but from dulness and want of imagination as well."(p.5). He describes him as being like "the child so sure he can run alone that he snatches his hand from his mother's, and sets off through dirt and puddles, so to act the part of the great personage he would consider himself."(p.5)

But, for this lack of development, MacDonald holds his parents responsible, and indeed, admonishes all such parents:

> Wise as was the mother, and far-seeing as was the father, they had made the mistake common to all but the wisest parents, of putting off to a period more or less too late the moment of beginning to teach their children obedience. If this be not commenced at the first possible moment, there is no better reason why it should be begun at any other, except that it will be the harder every hour it is postponed. The spiritual loss and injury caused to the child by their waiting till they fancy him fit to reason with is immense: yet there is nothing in which parents are more stupid and cowardly, if not stiffnecked, than this. I do not speak of those mere animal parents whose lasting influence over their progeny is not a thing to be greatly desired, but of those who, having a conscience, yet avoid this part of their duty in a manner of which a good motherly cat would be ashamed. To one who has learned of all things to desire deliverance from himself, a nursery in which the children are humoured and scolded and punished instead

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[69] Ibid. p. 3.

> of being taught obedience, looks like a moral slaughterhouse.[70]

The obedience which MacDonald is speaking of is obedience to the inner voice of conscience. Initially, the parents create an atmosphere within the home of truth, goodness, kindness, mercy - all the characteristics of love; and until the child is able to be a law unto him/herself, obedience is demanded so as to maintain the environment for the rest of the family and also, that s/he may begin to understand through participation. This participation should gradually result in an experiential ratification and a making of the Gospel values their own.

MacDonald felt that punishment should always be "corrective punishment", and dependent upon the love relationship. If there was not a deep bond of love, then he felt that punishment should be as minimal as possible; and this both for the sake of the child, lest s/he misunderstand the intention of the punishment, and, because he felt that a person could not be truly just without love for the other person. Initially, the child is able to obey because of the loving trust or the trust in the love of the parent and this is often transferred to their relationship with God -living the first Great Commandment as we have defined it- and thus encountering the challenges of life with hopeful openness. MacDonald had his own personal experience of this in regard to his father of whom he said he never asked him for

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[70] Ibid. pp. 11-12. It should be noted that "obedience", for MacDonald, does not flow from fear, but from trust in one's parents who love them, and later obedience to the duty which their conscience presents to them, leading to gradual understanding.

anything he did not receive and extolled the relationship which they had and which gave him confidence in God. In one of his poems he wrote:

> Thou hast been faithful to my highest need;
> And I thy debtor, ever, evermore,
> Shall never feel the grateful burden sore.
> Yet most I thank thee not for any deed,
> But for the sense thy living self did breed,
> That fatherhood is at the great world's core.[71]

MacDonald felt that obedience, in a child and in an adult, meant doing at least what you partially understand or know to be right, for that both leads to and prepares for greater understanding. For example, in his book The Hope of the Gospel he says:

> Men would understand: they do not care to obey; - understand where it is impossible they should understand save by obeying. They would search into the work of the Lord instead of doing their part in it.[72]

He was adamant in the need to live the Gospel in order to understand it. And with regard to children, although he felt that the dawn of reason helped to develop obedience, to only require a child to do what he fully understood could have disastrous consequences:

> To require of a child only what he can understand the reason of, is simply to help him to make himself his own God -that is a devil.[73]

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[71] George MacDonald. Dedication to his 1857 collection of poems The Hidden Life and Other Poems, opus cit., p.iii.

[72] George MacDonald. The Hope of the Gospel (1892) (Whitehorn California: Johannesen, 1995) p. 23.

[73] George MacDonald. Weighed and Wanting, opus cit., p. 12.

One who imposes his own meaning on things, creating a "reality" of which s/he is the centre, rather than seeking to find their true meaning, the meaning of which we call reality. Cornelius was "one of these devils", full of the pride of his own self-importance and although pride is not classified as a defense mechanism, it seems to act (as they do) to impair intrapsychic health by causing a distortion in intrapersonal perception which cuts one off from the potential life-giving energies of the inner true self; and this, in turn, hinders them from being moved by the suffering of others, and indeed from genuine interpersonal relationships. St. Thomas Aquinas defined pride as an "appetite for excellence in excess of right reason"[74] The person gets caught up in their own or imagined gifts. This inordinate desire for excellence which the proud person displays tends to make him seek his joy in receiving "praise and reverence" from others as that is their proper object, not the joy of friendship. Hence s/he remains side-tracked and doesn't go beyond him/herself either in growth or love. They don't live in reality, in a world of others as they are with their own needs, but stay trapped in an isolating delusion[75]. This seems to be why Cornelius could not live the commandment to love his neighbour as himself.

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[74] St. Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologica trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster Maryland: Christian Classics, 1981 reprint of 1920 ed.) II-II, q. 162, a. 1, ad 2.

[75] We shall say more about the isolation of pride in the next section where we will refer it to the human spirit closed off from love which alone unites.

Traditionally, the cure for pride is to be humbled, that is, you hit your head on reality so hard that it breaks the bubble of your deluded self-importance and catapults you into a true understanding of yourself and a true relation to those around you. This is what eventually happens to Cornelius.

The Tragic Triad

We would like to address Frankl's "tragic triad" from the Christian perspective of George MacDonald, in which he sees them permeated with the beautiful face of "Eschatological Hope" which heartens and encourages the sufferer of these "tragedies" and gives life and meaning to his/her life of faith.

Guilt

As we said above, Victor Frankl sees guilt as that which moves us to change for the better, to rise above it by growing beyond ourselves -"only in the face of guilt does it make sense to improve". It is by this effort toward "improving" that we use our freedom responsibly and can continue living as this eases the pain of guilt in an understandable and meaningful way. Yet, guilt is an existential burden for which there is no real solution in this world, since the damage is done and can often never be set right. The mature person lives with this as part of the human condition, a condition which they were born into; and hence sees and accepts his/her fallibility as a necessary

present concomitant reality to freedom.

Traditional Christianity offers the eternal dimension in which God can recompense anyone for things they have suffered and thus make up for the damage done, and this knowledge lifts a good deal of the burden of guilt from the perpetrator of the harm. MacDonald, we feel, goes deeper, offering a solution within eternity which goes to the root of the pain of guilt. He is not satisfied with simply handing it over to the Father to rectify the injustice, but rather takes into account the universality of God's Commandments to Love and thus the human love-need to be personally reconciled with those we have hurt.

For MacDonald, until we are able to live the truth that we are all children of the one Father, we shall not experience complete peace:

> we shall never be able, I say, to rest in the bosom of the Father, til the fatherhood is fully revealed to us in the love of the brothers. For he cannot be our Father, save as he is their father; and if we do not see him and feel him as their father, we cannot know Him as ours...to rest...even in those hands in which the Lord commended his spirit, we must have learned already **to love our neighbour as ourselves.**[76]

He seeks then, to offer an imaginative solution that satisfies the human need to love and be loved not just by God, but by all our brothers and sisters -all His children. In his Fantasy novel Lilith (1895), the protagonist has finally lain down to sleep in

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[76] George MacDonald. Unspoken Sermons, (first series, 1867) "The Hands of the Father" (Whitehorn, California: Johannesen Publishers, 1997 reprint of 1867 edition published by Alexander Strahan, London) p. 127.

Adam's house of death where the healing power of that death restores and brings to perfection. He has only done this after many mistakes -chiefly due to preferring his will to God's, but has now finally freely relinquished his own will, thus dying to self. In this sleep of death the need for reconciliation looms large:

> I grew aware of existence, aware also of the profound, the infinite cold....The cold had soothed every care, dissolved every pain, comforted every sorrow. **Comforted?** Nay; sorrow was swallowed up in the life drawing nigh to restore every good and lovely thing a hundredfold! I lay at peace, full of the quietest expectation, breathing the damp odours of Earth's bountiful bosom....
> Then, of a sudden, but not once troubling my conscious bliss, all the wrongs I had ever done, from far beyond my earthly memory down to the present moment, were with me. Fully in every wrong lived the conscious I, confessing, abjuring, lamenting the dead, making atonement with each person I had injured, hurt, or offended. Every human soul to which I had caused a troubled thought, was now grown unspeakably dear to me, and I humbled myself before it, agonising to cast from between us the clinging offence. I wept at the feet of the mother whose commands I had slighted; with bitter shame I confessed to my father that I had told him two lies, and long forgotten them: now for long had remembered them, and kept them in memory to crush at last at his feet. I was the eager slave of all whom I had thus or anyhow wronged. Countless services I devised to render them! For this one I would build such a house as had never grown from the ground! for that one I would train such horses as had never yet been seen in any world! For a third I would make such a garden as had never bloomed, haunted with still pools, and alive with running waters! I would write songs to make their hearts swell, and tales to make them glow! I would turn the forces of the world into such channels of invention as to make them laugh with the joy of wonder! Love possessed me! Love was my life! Love was to me, as to him who made me, all in all![77]

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[77] George MacDonald. Lilith (1895) (Whitehorn, California: Johannesen Pub. Co., 1994 reprint of 1896 edition of Chatto & Windus, London) ch. 43, pp. 241-242.

Suffering

For Victor Frankl, suffering brings with it growth and maturity,[78] however, it is something that is impossible to understand through reason alone as it exceeds dimensionally reasons power, yet he says it is:

> accessible to an act of commitment which emerges out of the depth and centre of man's total existence. What we have to deal with is not an intellectual or rational process, but a wholly existential act which perhaps could be described by what I call Urvetrauen zum Dasein, "the basic trust in Being"[79]

This bespeaks a trust that somehow the evil we perceive is not what it appears. It appeals to a deep-seated hope based in the

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[78] Some would argue that suffering sometimes brings bitterness and personal decay. For example, when there is too much of it. Edward Schillebeeckx offers an analysis of human suffering which exemplifies the perplexity. He first points out from our own experiences we find that "certain forms of suffering... enrich our humanity in a positive sense, which can even mature men so that they become thoroughly good and wise personalities." And how suffering can "make us sensitive to other men. Love and attractiveness, as openness towards others, are at the same time the capacity to suffer: vulnerability." Certain types of suffering, then, are beneficial to terrestial growth, and can be understood as such. However, when looking at the world, he says that "there is an excess of suffering and evil in our history...There is too much unmerited and senseless suffering for us to be able to give an ethical, hermeneutical and ontological analysis of our disaster." (Edward Schillebeeckx, Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World, trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1980) pp. 724-725).
These would especially represent times when bitterness and personal decay might be the result. However, while this is true, that very life of bitterness is itself painfully isolating; and when that pain exceeds the pain of the original suffering or disappointment, then a more life-enhancing solution is eventually embarked upon and personal growth ensues. (In the next chapter the inevitability of growth is taken up in greater detail.)

[79] see footnote 59 above.

very depths of existence itself, beyond the reach of the rational understanding, yet felt and trusted.

Christ, in the Gospel (Lk.13:1-5) apparently shows no compassion when it is reported to him of Pilate mixing the people's own blood with their sacrifices; nor with the tower falling down and killing 18 people, yet, in all the situations in the Gospel in which he is present, he is full of compassion and acts accordingly. This contradictory stance seems to speak not at all of arbitrariness in the face of human suffering, but rather a trustful leaving of such tragedy to His Father as He did his own crucifixion. And this trustful "leaving to the Father" bespeaks a hidden face of suffering which escapes rational argument, yet is rooted in existential trust in Being itself, as Frankl puts it, or Faith in the Father of all existence as Christ exhibited it.

The "hidden face of suffering" -a face of beauty and goodness- was for MacDonald a truth inseparable from the truth of the goodness of God Himself. In his fantasy novel Lilith (1895), he personifies the suffering which occasions repentance in a veiled woman called Mara. There are many false opinions about her and her house "The House of Bitterness"; and the protagonist of the novel, Mr. Vane, tries to correct these false opinions while in conversation with a group of children who are traveling with him to Mara's house. He is in the process of bringing Lilith (a murderess, vampire-like woman-angel) to Mara that she might be brought to repentance.

On their way to Mara's house Mr. Vane listens to the children's objections against taking Lilith there for they had heard that Mara was not good and hurts people, calling her "the cat woman" because "she scratches people". Mr. Vane tries to allay their fears, telling them that he has stayed with her and knows her to be good. They also complain that they have heard that she is faceless and ugly. To this Vane tells them that she keeps her face covered, but he once saw it and it was most beautiful. In response to their fears that she will hurt them also, Vane answers:

> "She will not hurt you, -or if she does-"
>
> "Ah, you are not sure about it...you think she **may** hurt us!"
>
> [Vane responds] "I am sure she will never be unkind to you, even if she do hurt you!"[80]

And further on in the same chapter, to reassure one of the children that her purposes for Lilith are for good, even if it involves suffering, she shows him her hidden face:

> She caught him up, turned her back to the rest of us, drew the muffling down from her face, and held him at arms' length that he might see her.
> As if his face had been a mirror, I saw in it what he saw. For one moment he stared, his little mouth open; then a divine wonder arose in his countenance, and swiftly changed to intense delight. For a minute he gazed entranced, then she set him down. Yet a moment he stood looking up at her, lost in contemplation-

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[80] George MacDonald. Lilith, opus cit., ch. 38., p. 203.

then ran to us with the face of a prophet that knows a bliss he cannot tell.[81]

Similarly, in the children's fantasy novel At the Back of the Northwind (1871), the mysterious Northwind is perceived by the Christ-like child Diamond as a beautiful woman with long flowing hair who comes to him when he goes to bed at night and takes him with her on adventures. Yet, to those who have not enough good in them, Northwind is perceived as something fearful. To a drunken nurse she is seen as a wolf. Near the end of the novel, Diamond questions her as to her actual existence, that is, that perhaps she is a figment of imagination that he has dreamed, she answers:

> "if I were only a dream, you would not have been able to love me so. You love me when you are not with me, don't you?"
>
> "Indeed I do", answered Diamond, stroking her hand. "I see! I see! How could I be able to love you as I do if you weren't there at all, you know? Besides, I couldn't be able to dream anything half so beautiful out of my own head; or if I did, I couldn't love a fancy of my own like that, could I?"
>
> "I think not. You might have loved me in a dream, dreamily, and forgotten me when you woke, I daresay, but not loved me like a real being as you love me. Even then, I don't think you could dream anything that hadn't something real like it somewhere. But you've seen me in many shapes, Diamond: you remember I was a wolf once -don't you?"
>
> "Oh yes - a good wolf that frightened a naughty drunken nurse."
>
> "Well, suppose I were to turn ugly, would you rather I weren't a dream then?"
>
> "Yes; for I should know that you were beautiful inside all the same. You would love me, and I should love you all the same. I shouldn't like you to look ugly, you

[81] Ibid. p. 205.

know. But I shouldn't believe it a bit."

"Not if you saw it?"

"No, not if I saw it ever so plain."[82]

She goes on to tell Diamond that she is sometimes called "Bad Fortune, sometimes Evil Chance, sometimes Ruin; and they have another name for me which they think the most dreadful of all"[83] -death.

Yet, with Diamond, the reader has fallen in love with Northwind and with Diamond and with goodness. It is an almost intoxication which engages the reader at a subconscious level and has a power for instilling a love for moral goodness and even the suffering which may be necessary to achieve it. And this gives us a new perspective on life.

For MacDonald, suffering was a way that God teaches us to see and discover things as they actually are according to his creation, so that we learn to discern and freely choose what will be self-enriching to our human nature. He never leaves the reader with a situation that is hopeless, as he felt that that did not express the reality of things. In the novel The Seaboard Parish (1868), the protagonist, Mr Walton, meets a young artist who, through his paintings tries to expose the poverty and misery of life in the cities and so stimulate the social conscience of the viewer to action. While visiting his studio

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[82] George MacDonald. At the Back of the Northwind (1871) (London: Octopus Books Ltd., 1979) pp. 281-282.

[83] Ibid. p. 282.

he is shown a painting of a man who has just died in a run-down room, where a large rat is sticking its head out of a hole in one of the walls. The man's wife is leaning over him in anguish and some men are at the door ready to carry away the body.

Mr. Walton admonishes him for showing such a limited scene of life -one of pain without hope:

> "How can you bear to paint such a dreadful picture?"
>
> "It is only a true one. It only represents fact."
>
> "All facts have not a right to be represented."
>
> "Surely you would not get rid of painful things by huddling them out of sight?"
>
> "No; nor yet by gloating upon them....From mere suffering people will turn away and you cannot blame them. Every show of it without hinting at some door of escape, only urges them to forget it all. Why should they be pained if it can do no good?....give people hope, if you would have them act at all -in anything."[84]

This is not to say that MacDonald never presented characters who experienced hopelessness. However, he does so in a way that, within the Mystery of life itself there is always reason for hope.

"I dinna ken from whaur I come"

MacDonald frequently quoted Goldsmith in saying that "we are born from the heart of God", and his works are filled with an optimism which expresses this. In the novel Malcolm (1875) he

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[84] George MacDonald. The Seaboard Parish (1868) (London: Strahan and Co., 1869) pp. 610-612.

explores the dark regions of incomprehensible suffering through the character of Stephen Stewart. He is the "laird" of the small property and ancient house of Kirkbyres, and is called by most "the Mad Laird"[85], and whose story and miseries are related in an intermittent manner throughout the novel. He is the only son of a widowed landowner, MacDonald describes him as:

> a man of dwarfish height and uncertain age, with a huge hump upon his back, features of great refinement, a long thin beard, and a forehead unnaturally large, over eyes which, although of a pale blue, mingled with a certain mottled milky gleam, had a pathetic, dog-like expression.[86]

We are first introduced to him when he startles Barbara Catanach, the local midwife (of rather cruel harsh character), who is in front of her cottage staring out over the sea with her hands shading her eyes. She hadn't heard him approach and when she sees him standing next to her staring, she, with understandable surprise says, as anyone might:

> Preserve's! Whaur come ye frae?[87]

His reply is an all-consumimg mystery for him, and indeed for every person:

> I dinna ken whaur I come frae. Ye **ken** 'at I dinna ken whaur I come frae. I dinna ken whaur **ye** come frae. I dinna ken whaur onybody comes frae.[88]

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[85] George MacDonald. Malcolm (1875) (London: Cassell and co. Ltd., 1927), pp. 8-9.

[86] Ibid. p. 7.

[87] Ibid., p. 8.

[88] Ibid.

When she asks him why he was staring at her, he replies:

> I thoct ye was luikin' whaur ye cam frae.
>
> "Deed I fash [trouble] wi' nae sic freits [superstitions]."
>
> "Sae lang 's ye ken whaur ye 're gaein' till, suggested the man"
>
> "Toots! I fash as little wi'that either, and ken jist as muckle about the tane as the tither."[89]

(She, like many people, has not yet begun to give a thought to the mystery of their existence.)

He replies:

> "I ken mair nor that mysel', but no muckle, said the man. "I dinna ken whaur I cam frae, and I dinna ken whaur I'm gaun till; but I ken 'at I'm gaun **whaur** I cam frae. That stan's to rizzon, ye see; but they telled me 'at **ye** kenned a' about whaur we a' cam frae."[90]

She finally gets tired of him; and to be rid of him she tells him that knowing "where" doesn't matter (and here he is hanging on every word waiting for a revelation):

> "sae lang's I cam frae my mither", said the woman, looking down on the inquirer with a vulgar laugh.[91]

With this, MacDonald tells us:

> The hunchback uttered a shriek of dismay, and turned and fled; and as he turned, long thin white hands flashed out of his pockets, and pressed against his ears, and intertwined their fingers at the back of his neck.[92]

His reaction to the word "mither" is because of the unmotherlike

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid. p. 8 for the preceeding conversation.

[92] Ibid.

treatment the Laird has received and continues to receive from her throughout the novel. The only things she allows him from his estate, which she manages, are five pounds a year pocket money and his clothes. MacDonald tells us further that:

> He never went near his own house, for, from some unknown reason, plentifully aimed at in the dark by the neighbours, he had such a dislike to his mother that he could not hear the name of mother, or even the slightest allusion to the relationship.[93]

Sometimes he slept rough, but most of the time he slept in net storage sheds of those fishermen in the town who knew him and were sensitive enough to see that he was a good man, and certainly harmless to himself and others.

People in the town conjectured all sorts of reasons for his madness, however, MacDonald, through the mouth of one of the fishermen who shows him kindness tells us:

> He's but a puir cratur, wha's tribble's ower strong for him...[94]

He continues to crop up in the novel, ever crying out "I dinna ken whaur I cam frae."[95] One night, while speaking to Malcolm, (the protagonist of the novel, a young honest caring man) he gains some new insight into his query. It comes about in the following way. Malcolm is alone by the sea and "A sweet wind was blowing...." All of a sudden he hears from the dark the

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[93] Ibid. p.9.

[94] Ibid. p. 10.

[95] Ibid. e.g., pp. 37, 56, 146-147.

Laird's voice:

> "I dinna ken whaur it comes frae,...."
>
> "Naebody kens whaur the win comes frae, or whaur it gangs til," said Malcolm. Ye're no a hair waur off nor ither fowk, there laird."
>
> "Does't come frae a guid place, or frae an ill?" said the laird doubtingly.
>
> "It's saft an' kin'ly i' the fin' o' 't," returned Malcolm suggestively, rising and joining the laird on the top of the dune, and like him spreading himself out to the western air.[96]

[Here, MacDonald describes the scene and the effect that nature has upon them influencing their mood and suggesting meaning beyond their ken]:

> The twilight had deepened, merging into such night as the summer in that region knows -a sweet pale memory of the past blue; there was no moon; the darker sea lay quiet below, with only a murmur about its lip, and fitfully reflected the stars. The soft wind kept softly blowing. Behind them shone a light at the harbour's mouth, and a twinkling was here and there visible in the town above: but all was as still as if there were no life save in the wind and the sea and the stars. The whole feeling was as if something had been finished in heaven, and the outmost ripples of the following first had overflowed and were now pulsing faintly and dreamily across the bosom of the labouring earth, with feeblest suggestion of the mighty peace beyond. Alas, words can do so little! even such a night is infinite.[97]
>
> "Ay," answered the laird; "but it makes me downfart (meloncholy) like, i' the inside".
>
> "Some o' the best things does that," said Malcolm. "I think a kiss frae my mither wad gar me greet [make me cry]."[98]

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[96] Ibid. p. 126 for the previous conversation.

[97] Ibid. pp. 126-127.

[98] Ibid. p.127.

Malcolm has inadverently said the forbidden word and the laird runs off giving out a moaning cry and putting his hands over his ears. Rather than chasing after him, which would cause him more distress, Malcolm judges the direction of his escape and runs around in order to intercept him. When the laird comes upon him anew Malcolm makes believe that he is seeing him for the first time that evening. Upon seeing Malcolm in front of him "Mr. Stewart stopped abruptly, took his fingers from his ears, and stared in perplexity."[99]

"It's a richt bonny nicht, laird," said Malcolm.

After the laird overcomes his perplexity at "twa o' them!" Malcolm continues:

> "It's a fine, saft-sleekit win', laird," said Malcolm, as if they were meeting for the first time that night. "I think it maun come frae the blue there, ayont the stars. There's a heap o' wonnerfu' things there, they tell me; an' whiles a strokin win' an' whiles a rosy smell, an' whiles a bricht licht, an' whiles, they say, an auld yearnin' sang, 'ill brak oot, an' wanner awa doon, an' gang flittin' an fleein' amang the sair herts o' the men and women fowk 'at canna get things putten richt."[100]

Inevitably, the conversation is brought by the laird to his constant concern:

> "....I dinna ken whaur I come frae," burst the laird, the word whaur drawn out and emphasized almost to a howl.[101]

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[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid. pp. 127-128.

[101] Ibid. p.128.

To try to comfort him, Malcolm tells him that the minister at the church on Sunday had said that "ilka good an' perfit gift was frae abune, an' cam frae the Father o' lichts".[102]

> "Father o' lichts!" repeated the laird, and looked up at the stars. "I dinna ken whaur I cam frae. I hae nae father. I hae only a... I hae only a wuman...."
>
> "The Father o' lichts is your father an mine -the Father o' a' o' 's," said Malcolm.
>
> "O' a' guid fowk, I daursay," said the laird, with a deep and quivering sigh.[103]

Malcolm then brings in the authority of the schoolmaster, Mr. Graham, whom they both respect:

> "Mr. Graham says -o' a' body", returned Malcolm, "guid an' ill; -o' the guid to haud them guid an' mak them better -o' the ill to mak them guid."[104]
>
> "Eh! gien that war true!"said the laird. They walked in silence for a minute. All at once the laird threw up his hands and fell flat on his face on the sand, his poor hump rising skywards above his head....he was praying "Father o' lichts! Father o' lichts! Father o' lichts!....He [Malcolm] could not enter into his strife to aid him, or come near him in any closer way than watching by his side until his morning dawned, or at least the waters of his flood assuaged, yet what he could do he must: he would wake with him in his conflict.[105]

Through Malcolm we experience both powerlessness and obligation

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid. pp. 128-129. The laird is deeply touched by this phrase "O Father o' lichts, and from this point on in the novel the laird's cry is now directed towards God, often omitting the "I dinna ken whaur I cam frae" and simply crying out "O Father o' lichts". e.g. pp. 187, 189, 357.

toward our suffering brothers and sisters in humanity. Malcolm puts into words the laird's and our own perplexity about human suffering. He tells us that besides the suffering his poor humped back gives him, the laird suffers because he interprets his suffering as an indicating proof that he is a child of sin and wrath, not a beloved of the Father:

> "An' he suffers a hantle, forbye in his puir feeble min', tryin' to unnerstan' the guid things 'at fowlk tell him, an' jaloosin [suspecting] its his ain wyte [blame] 'at he disna unnerstan' them better; an' whiles he thinks himsel' the child o' sin and wrath, an' that Sawtan has some special propriety in him, as the carritchis [shorter catechism] says..."[106]

As the novel progresses the poor laird's sufferings only increase as his mother hires men to hunt and capture him so that she can put him in an asylum. He then lives in continual fear and hiding on top of his anguish as to his origins (and within those origins, the hope or despair of his future). His new prayer "O Father o' lichts", although giving him a new insight into where to seek for the answer to his question, unfortunately, goes unanswered. One night:

> His eyes were fixed on a faint spot of steely blue, out on the sea, not far from the horizon...."It micht be the mark o the sole o' his fut...."[107]

He asks Phemy, a young girl who has become his friend, to keep her eye out for the possibility of seeing anything more. If she does, he instructs her to cry out "O Father o' lichts".

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[106] Ibid. p. 227.

[107] Ibid. p.355.

She asks: "Will he hear to that -div ye think sir?"

The laird responds:

> "Wha kens! He micht jist turn his heid, an' ae luik wad sair [serve] me for a hunner year....
> Maybe he wad tak the hump aff o' me, an' set things in order i' my heid, an mak me like ither fowk. Eh me! that wad be gran'! Naebody wad daur to touch me syne. Eh Michty! coom oot! Father o' lichts!"[108]

MacDonald tells us that:

> At length he rose and wandered away from the shore, his head sunk upon his chest....

Phemy tries to comfort him saying:

> "Maybe he'll come oot upo' ye afore ye ken someday - whan ye're no luiken' for him."
>
> The Laird stopped and gazed at her for a moment, shook his head, and walked on.[109]

We have one final encounter with the laird. Malcolm learns that he is seriously ill and, to his astonishment, has gone home. The laird, lying in bed, tells Malcolm his usual concern:

> "I dinna ken whaur I cam frae! -I kenna whaur I'm gaein' till. -Eh, gien he wad but come oot an' shaw himsel'! -O Lord! tak the deevil aff o' my puir back. -O Father o' lichts! gar him tak the hump wi' him. I hae nae fawvour for it, though it's been my constant companion this mony a lang....Wull I ever ken whaur I cam frae?...."

He then, finding no help from God, gives out an anguished instinctive cry for his mother, the one who should have eased his life-burden, but only compounded it:

> [He] gave a shriek and cried out, "Mither, mither!" fell into a fit so violent that the heavy bed shook

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[108] Ibid. MacDonald compares him to Job at this point.

[109] Ibid. p.356.

with convulsions.[110]

The mad laird's sad story comes to a close shortly after this. Malcolm has put a few sticks on the smouldering peat fire and as they catch fire and blaze up:

> The laird turned his face towards the flame; a smile came over it; his eyes opened wide, and with such an expression of seeing gazed beyond Malcolm, that he turned his in the same direction.
>
> "Eh, the bonny man! The bonny man!" murmured the laird. [An expression he had used once before in the novel, shortly after having wandered into a church at communion time and received the Sacrament.]
>
> But Malcolm saw nothing, and turned again to the laird: his jaw had fallen, and the light was fading out of his face like the last sunset. He was dead.[111]

The character of the "Mad Laird" is one of inexplicable suffering, yet, the reader is left with belief rather than despair. This occurs for the following reasons: the story of the laird is embedded within a novel which speaks of God's care and concern for the protagonist, Malcolm, who, though the heir to the title and estate of the Marquis of Lossie, upon being born is immediately carried off from his mother, who is told that he was born dead, by the boy's uncle and the assistance of the malevolent midwife Barbara Catanach. He is then dumped, so to speak, into the arms of a blind piper who raises him as his own grandson. The poor life circumstances he has been placed in serve to bring out in him Christ-like qualities: truth, honesty, humility, goodness, courage, compassion and forgiveness --such

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[110] Ibid. p. 404.

[111] Ibid. p. 405.

that we cannot help but admire and desire such qualities for ourselves--rather than having caused him harm. And in the end he is restored to his natural rights as the Marquis of Lossie.

This creates an atmosphere of God's loving Providence, one in which the "mad laird" must also be a receiver. We are left, therefore, with the hope-filled conviction that surely this poor tortured creature will be taken into the arms of the God "from whaur he cam" and be comforted as a child of prediliction.

Thus, for MacDonald, suffering is always encountered within the hope-filled context of God's loving designs for the growth and maturity of his children such that even when the particular vision is obscured, there is still reason to hope and trust. Likewise, with Victor Frankl, who concludes the 1984 revised edition of his book Man's Search for Meaning under the chapter heading of "The Case for a Tragic Optimism", in which he reaffirms the growth through which suffering humanity passes -a growth that is experienced as, and recognised as, worthwhile - as truly meaning full.

Death

The facing of death for Frankl, as we said above, is both a reason to change one's life for the better while there is still time and also provides an opportunity through which one's attitude to death can be a dramatically transforming statement of growth:

> even the helpless victim of a hopeless situation, facing a fate he cannot change, may rise above himself, and by so doing change himself. He may change a personal tragedy into a triumph.[112]

It provides a final opportunity for self-transcendence.

For MacDonald, death is not the dread of humanity, but rather the passageway to more life. It is the unobscured essence of the good of suffering, which itself is a means to more life, that is, more of the life of God in us. In his novel The Seaboard Parish (1868) a young woman, Connie, has a riding accident that damages her spine causing much pain and immobility. Yet, through this suffering she comes to see and appreciate more and more God's hidden Life enlivening everything. And, at one point, where she is about to be carried down from a scenic precipice by her father and a friend, her father asks her if she would like to cover her eyes with a blindfold first so as not to be frightened by the perilous descent. Her reply gives evidence of a loving trust in her father and insight into the mystery of suffering and death:

> "But I shan't be frightened, papa"
>
> "How do you know that?"
>
> "Because you are going to carry me."
>
> "But what if I should slip? I might, you know"
>
> "I don't mind. I shan't mind being tumbled over the precipice, if you do it. I shan't be to blame, and I'm sure you won't, papa." Then she drew my head down and whispered in my ear, "If I get as much more by being killed, as I have by having my poor back hurt,

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[112] Victor Frankl. Man's Search for Meaning, opus cit., p. 170.

I'm sure it will be well worth it."[113]

Death in the fantasy writings

In his fantasy story "The Golden Key" the protagonist, Mossy, is in search of the land "from which the shadows fall", that is, the heaven-like land he sees within a rainbow in the land of faerie:

> He stood gazing at it until he forgot himself with delight....in each of the colours, which was as large as the column of a church, he could faintly see beautiful forms slowly ascending as if by the steps of a winding stair. The forms appeared irregularly - now one, now many, now several, now none - men and women and children - all different, all beautiful.[114]

In his search for the lock into which the golden key, which he has found at the base of the rainbow fits, he comes across "the Old Man of the Sea", who welcomes him and gives him hospitality and refreshes him in a baptism-like bath of "death" which gives Mossy renewed strength to continue his journey:

> Now Mossy was an old man by this time...and his feet were very weary. After looking at him for a moment, the Old Man took him by the hand and led him into his inner cave. There he helped him undress, and laid him in the bath.[115]

Mossy tells the Old Man of the Sea that he has been looking for the place from which the shadows fall and the keyhole for the golden key for a long time, for he says:

> "I have lived a good while, I believe," said Mossy, sadly. "I'm not sure that I'm old, but I know my feet

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[113] George MacDonald. The Seaboard Parish (1868) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1973) ch 17. p. 366.

[114] George Macdonald. "The Golden Key", The Gifts of the Child Christ (1882), ed. by Glenn Edward Sadler, vol.1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1973) pp. 154-155.

[115] Ibid. p. 174.

ache."

"Do they?" said the Old Man, as if he really meant to ask the question; and Mossy, who was still lying in the bath, watched his feet for a moment before he replied.

"No, they do not," he answered. "Perhaps I am not old either."

"Get up and look at yourself in the water."

He rose and looked at himself in the water, and there was not a gray hair on his head or a wrinkle on his skin.

"You have tasted of death now," said the Old Man. "Is it good?"

"It is good," said Mossy. "It is better than life."

"No," said the Old Man; "it is only more life. Your feet will make no holes on the water now."[116]

Mossy continues his journey transformed and refreshed by death, but still not having arrived at his destination. When he finally does "arrive" and finds the keyhole, he is described by his former travelling companion (Tangle) as now wonderfully transformed:

> you are like the Old Man of the Sea. No. You are like the Old Man of the Earth. No, no. You are like the oldest man of all. You are like them all. And yet you are my own old Mossy![117]

The men she is comparing him to were both of great age, the older appearing the youngest: the Old Man of the Earth appearing as a mere infant. And this has been one of the discoveries throughout the story that old age is synonymous with youthfulness. Death, for MacDonald, is a door upon the journey which opens to increased life and vigour, yet, is not the end of

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[116] Ibid. pp. 174-175.

[117] Ibid. p. 176.

the journey to the perfection which God calls us to. For, this "call" is really a gift by creation - that original gift which we, by nature, cannot be perfectly at rest with until we have arrived at its perfection.

Finally, returning to MacDonald's last fantasy novel Lilith (1895), to the "House of the Dead" where the dead sleep, slowly being transformed through dreams which are indistinguishable from reality, we find that the only people who are allowed to rest there are those who have died to self. The other dead of this land are horribly portrayed: some as grotesque creatures still full of murder, living under the earth; others appear as walking skeletons, still in their party attire, condemned for the present to dance each night away until they gradually recognise their own povery and misery.

When the protagonist's beloved, Lona, has been killed by the mother she sought to find and love, he takes her body to the house of death in the hope that she can rest there until the resurrection. But he is a bit apprehensive, since he has been told by Adam that no one can lie down there unless they have freely asked to:

> "I rode Lona's horse and carried her body. I would take it to her father [Adam]: He would give it a couch in the chamber of his dead! or, if he would not, seeing she had not come of herself, I would watch it in the desert until it mouldered away! But, I believed he would, for surely she had died long ago."[118]

The death he is speaking of is a death to the self-seeking self.

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[118] George Macdonald. Lilith (1895), opus cit., ch. 38, p. 198.

In the healing, restoring death of those in the "chamber of the dead" there has already taken place this prerequisite in the human will which consists in love of God and love of neighbour more than oneself: a complete surrender or openness to God's Will to the point of accepting physical death with loving trust. It is the Gospel imperative "He who loses his life for my sake will find it". Thus the truth about those who die having already died to self, is that "death" is synonymous with "life", and is the door to a new dimension of eternal life and growth. The strangulation of flow of inner eternal life through fear and selfishness is the living death of isolation. We will examine the growth to perfect life and its obstacles, according to MacDonald, in greater detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

We have tried to show that both Christianity and the psychologies we have looked at (those which acknowledge a spiritual dimension in Man) seek the same goals when speaking of human growth to perfection. Both speak of a need to follow conscience and so to engender the emergence of the "true self": "the fully-functioning person", "the authentic individual", "the Christ-like person". An atmosphere of security in which to exercise freedom and so to be faithful to conscience was especially prevalent in Humanistic Psychology and supports MacDonald's view of the importance of the Christian's perception of God. We feel that it is especially here that Christianity can make a contribution. For Christianity should be creating an overall ambience of life-enhancing hope amidst suffering, guilt

and death. Just as the story of Malcolm shrouds the "Mad Laird's" tragedy in optimistic hope, so too the resurrection of Christ and the self-sacrificing resurrection-testimony of Christians ought to provide an ambience of optimism amidst tragedy and suffering --showing its "hidden face"-- testifying to the larger reality of immortal life in the Source of all life --God. It is by way of this indirect "proof", one which creates an unspoken atmosphere of trust within which growth can occur, that experiential knowledge of God as "self-giving Love" becomes evident to society. It is especially in this way, then, that religion can give hope to the secular world.

Chapter IV

CONVERSION AS ANTHROPOLOGY

An Overview of Conversion

Our interest in "conversion" is, of course, from the Christian perspective. However, to begin with, in a more general sense conversion could mean a person's change of mind about anything, be it person, place, thing, set of ideas, etc.. For example, you could be converted to a particular political party or even, in a broad sense, be "converted" to Chinese food. It simply means a new judgment (or new in the sense of re-evaluation) for, or in favour of, something or someone, based upon new information or from presently held information perceived subjectively in a new way, or from a combination of both.

In a Christian sense, that new judgment has to do with one's thinking about Christ and hence God, and all the implications in one's life flowing from that judgment; and it is often bound up with repentance and penitence. It is a judgment informed by the Scriptures, tradition (i.e., by both church of whatever denomination to which one belongs or presently is or was influenced by, as well as the witness of those who have lived the Christian life that one is aware of either through reading or hearing or by association), and personal experience (here we would include various psychological factors, moral factors, experiences of God either in prayer or nature, or the sense of having received help from beyond oneself or one's personal

resources). And to each of these we must add the degree to which the subject gives credence to these factors. All in all, a very complex issue which bespeaks both the individuality and unique life history of every person, as well as, the mystery of our existence. To gain a better understanding of the phenomenon or process of conversion, we will examine it from the Biblical sources.

It is probably clear, from what has been said above, that we are not speaking of "conversion" in the sense of joining a particular religious group or changing denominations[1], rather, this will be of interest to us only temporarily, as it influences the individual person's journey toward or away from God. There are, of course, conversions involving both an interior change as well as an exterior commitment to a group. St. Paul's conversion would be one example of this (Acts 9: 1-19).

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[1] This is not to say that conversion in this sense does not appear in the Old Testament. For there were converts to Judaism in this sense called "God-fearers"(ger in Hebrew, sojourners who lived in the land with the Israelites, owned property, and had to keep the Sabbath), who kept the Law and even participated in some of the cultic festivals, including Passover if they were circumcised. However, this term had little to do with the personal holiness of these converts. Likewise in the New Testament the Greek word "proselytos" (which translates the Hebrew "ger" in the LXX) is never used to indicate personal holiness. It occurs 4 times in the New Testament. Once, in Matt. 23:15, where Jesus is denouncing the Pharisees' hypocracy and wickedness in gaining converts and "making them twice as wicked as yourselves"; the remaining 3 times in Acts 2:11; 6:5; 13:43. Each time to identify a person who was or had been a convert to Judaism. cf. The New International DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY (3 vols.). Colin Brown, editor (translated, with additions and revisions, from the German Theologisches Begriffslexicon zum Neuen Testament. ed. by Lother Coenen, Erich Beyreuther and Hans Bietenhard. (Exeter, Devon: Paternoster Press Ltd., 1975) pp. 353-362.

Conversion in the Scriptures

In the Old Testament the word most commonly used for "conversion" is the Hebrew verb sub (the noun being t suba), translated in the LXX with the Greek verbs strepho and epistrepho (the noun being epistrephe). It literally refers to the idea of turning or returning. It occurs about 1050 times, 120 times being used in its specifically theological sense of turning to or returning to God. In the Historical Books it treats primarily with the nation Israel as a whole turning to God, i.e., being faithful to the Covenant, while the Prophets are more concerned with the individual's adherence to the ethical monotheism of Israel. The punishment for breaking the Covenant was any number of natural disasters - sickness, plague, famine, drought, etc. - as well as being given over to one's enemies. The rewards for keeping the Covenant or returning to God were, above all, forgiveness from sins, as well as concrete rewards such as health, fertility, prosperity, land, freedom from the oppression of one's enemies, etc.. However, when they were faced with the apparent incongruity of personal tragedy in spite of their fidelity to God, faithful trust was the preserving factor which underpinned their perseverance. For example, this can be seen in such theological tracts as Job and Ecclesiastes.

In Job, the question of "Why does the just man suffer?" is dealt with. Job looks for the reason for his sufferings as he is a "just man". But when he comes face to face with God, it is God

who asks him the questions, questions which reveal to Job his ignorance and God's power and wisdom such that it silences him. But the very experience of contact with God leaves him with a renewed and deeper trust in God in spite of the fact that he has still not received an explanation for his sufferings:

> Then Job answered the Lord and said: Behold, I am of little account; what can I answer you? I put my hand over my mouth....I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be hindered. I have dealt with great things which I do not understand; things too wonderful for me to know. I had heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you. Therefore, I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 40: 3-4; 42: 2-6)

In Ecclesiastes, the inability of the world's goods and pleasures to satisfy the human heart, as well as life's instabilities and hardships and death's inevitability all go into making the author question whether life and fidelity to God actually make any sense. However, the final words of the writer again bespeak faith and trust where understanding is lacking, not because he has seen, as Job has, but because the mystery of life, though beyond his ken, is rooted in a just God (something the individual can understand since justice is a self-evident aspect of human nature):

> The last word, when all is heard: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man's all; because God will bring to judgment every work, with all its hidden qualities, whether good or bad. (Ecc. 12: 13-14)

This faith-response to God is what Christ witnesses to par excellence in the New Testament. It is a life of trust which can only be lived and maintained through a personal experiential understanding of God at a level deeper than the rational under-

standing is yet able to perceive. And hence it is this faith attitude which provides a key idea of continuity between conversion in the Old Testament and that in the New Testament and to human change in general.

The New Testament

In the New Testament we continue to have epistrepho to carry the meaning of the Hebrew word sub for "conversion" with God taking the initiative, here presented as through the influence of the Holy Spirit; but the New Testament does not limit itself to this word alone. We see the introduction of the word metanoia (its verb form being metanoeo) to carry the meaning of repentance, conversion.[2] In the New Testament it is always used in this theologically technical way, unlike epistrepho which is used both theologically as well as in common speech for turning. In Greek literature, metanoia does not carry its New Testament theological meaning, it simply means to change one's mind, which also could involve remorse or grief. However, it does not carry the meaning of a complete change of life as it does in the New Testament since their religious culture did not express this.[3]

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[2] The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, opus cit., pp. 353-362.

[3] "Greek society never thought of a radical change in a man's life as a whole, of conversion, or turning round, even though we may find some of the factors which belong to conversion...", Ibid. p. 357.

A. D. Nock, in his book Conversion (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966 reprint of 1933 1st ed.), had proposed the same idea concerning Greek society. Contrasting Judaism and Christianity

In comparison with epistrepho we find that metanoia certainly "expresses the conscious turning from sin, a change of mind and of the whole inner attitude to life, without which true conversion is not possible," however, "epistrepho has a wider meaning than metanoeo, for it always includes faith, while metanoeo and pisteuo can stand together and complement each other"[4] Also, metanoia (literally, a turning of the mind or a changing of its direction) stresses the mind and will of the person in such a way as to focus upon the response and responsibility (cf. Mt. 3:8-12; Acts 13:24; 19:4) on the part of Man to the continual seeking and benevolence of God revealed in Christ. It is often used in the sense of turning from evil - "repent" or "repentance"- with the turning to God as preparation for participation in the Kingdom.(cf. Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 11:20-21; 12:41. Mk. 1:15;

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with Greek religions, he says that Judaism and Christianity required a change of life and not just rites which were safeguards for afterlife:

> there is no idea that the sacramental experiences of the initiate [in Greek religions] would make it easier for him to lead a good life here and now. Further, apart from Orphism and the ancient mysteries of Eleusis, it was never maintained that these rites were essential requisites of happiness hereafter - they were valuable safeguards...(pp. 12-13).

In relation to the Greeks struggle against sin he asserts that:

> They did not indeed desire to escape from sin [through religious rites], for it was in general assumed that moral evil, in so far as you were conscious of it, was something which of your own initiative you put from yourself before approaching the holy and not something you were delivered from by approaching the holy." (p.15)

[4] The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, opus cit., p.355.

6:12. Lk. 10:13; 11:32; 13:2-3; 15:17; 16:13; etc.[5]) When compared with one another in the two New Testament passages where they stand side by side (Acts 3:19; 26:20) "metanoeo describes rather a turning from evil and epistrepho the turning to God."[6] These two terms, then, indicate a radical turning of the whole person to God.

Paul and John

The notion of "conversion" is also expressed in other terms in the New Testament. In fact, epistrepho and metanoia only appear in the Pauline corpus six times; and apart from the Book of Revelation, they don't appear at all in the Johannine writings.

For Paul, conversion is a transformation into a likeness of Christ in such a way that there is unity and agreement of wills, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me", much like the unity and agreement of Christ's with his Father's as expressed in the Gospel of John (eg. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work", Jn. 4:34; but especially the idea of mutual indwelling: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me", 14:11; cf.14:20). The Christian's call is to perfection: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification"(1Thes. 4:3; cf. Eph. 1:4). Paul often expresses this in terms of faith. It is through faith that we recognise both our sinfulness and God's willingness to save in Christ. Through faith

[5] Cf. Concordance to the Greek New Testament. 5th ed. edited by Moulton and Geden, (Edinburgh: T.T. Clark, 1978) p. 637. Metanoia and metanoeo are used in this way over 50 times.

[6] The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology. opus cit., vol. 1, p. 359.

faith we die and rise with Christ, we put on the new man, we become new creations in Christ. And the location of this faith is in the heart[7] of man: "For if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Faith in the heart leads to justification...(Rom. 10: 9-10). "May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith...(Eph. 3:17). "The proof that you are sons is the fact that God has sent forth into our hearts the spirit

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[7] The word "heart" in the Biblical sense denotes the whole man - mind and heart:

> The connotations of the word "heart" are not the same in Hebrew and English. For us the heart is related to the affective life. From his heart a man loves or hates, desires or fears. But the heart has no part in the intellectual life. The Hebrew uses "heart" to indicate a wider range of meaning, including all that is within a man. It stands for sentiments, but also memories, thoughts, reasoning, and planning. The Hebrew frequently uses "heart" where we would say "memory", "mind", or "awareness".

Dictionary of Biblical Theology. ed. by X. Leon-Dufour, (London: G. Chapmam, 1969 reprint of 1967 first English edition of the 1962 French edition of Vocabulaire de Theologie Biblique. Paris: Les Editions du Cerf), Article entitled "Heart" by Jean de Fraine and Albert Vanhoye. pp. 200-201.

For the psychologist Carl Jung it is the unconscious part of man's psyche that he identifies with the heart:

> The unconscious is commonly regarded as a sort of incapsulated fragment of our most personal and intimate life - something like what the Bible calls the "heart" and considers the source of all evil thoughts. (From an article entitled "The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious", vol. 9, part 1 of The Collected Works of C.G. Jung. edited by Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964, p. 20)

He also sees it as a source of intuition and strength, but one which comes into play most frequently when the conscious self has reached its limitations in the face of a problem. At this point he would compare it with the effects of prayer since "[it] calls for a very similar attitude and has much the same effect" (ibid., p.21)

of his Son which cries out "Abba"! (Father) (Gal. 4:6). Likewise, in the Gospel, our Lord identifies the "heart" as the source from which flows evil designs - "murder, adulterous conduct, fornication, stealing, false witness, blasphemy." (Mt. 15:19); as well as the place from which we are to forgive (Mt. 18:35), and in whose totality we are to love: heart, soul, mind and strength (Lk. 10:27) - namely, with the totality of all that is ours, both consciously and, in potential, subconsciously.

For John, conversion is expressed in terms of a movement from "darkness to light", "death to life", love conquering hate, a striving after loving as Christ has loved us (Jn. 13:12). But especially, it is union with Christ, as stated above in relation to Paul's theology. For both Paul and John conversion is life in Christ.[8] -communion with the Living God. Repentance prepares the way. It "makes room", where we previously thought there was no more room, for a deeper radication into that part of ourselves that was hidden from our conscious - the subconscious or unconscious[9] self- and hence a deeper relationship of the whole of our

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[8] Cf. especially 1 Cor. chapter 12; Jn. chapters 14 and 15.

[9] Carl Jung says of the "unconscious" (the "subconscious" being a synonymous term): "Although people still labour under the delusion that consciousness represents the whole of the psychic man, it is nevertheless only a part, of whose relation to the whole we know very little. Since the unconscious component really is unconscious, no boundaries can be assigned to it: we cannot say where the psyche begins or ends. We know that consciousness and its contents are the modifiable part of the psyche, but the more deeply we seek to penetrate, at least indirectly, into the realm of the unconscious, the more the impression forces itself on us that we are dealing with something autonomous. We must admit that our best results, whether in education or treatment, occur when the unconscious co-operates, that is to say when the goal we are aiming at coincides with the unconscious trend of development, and that, conversely, our best

person with Christ. It changes us in such a way that we love our neighbor more and more as Christ does, i.e., unselfishly, with the reward being a deeper relationship with the God of our heart and often, a deeper bond of friendship with our neighbor.

Another idea in the Gospel signifying conversion is that the Christian is to become as a little child, with simplicity and utter dependence upon and trusting in your parents, if he or she is to enter or take part in the Kingdom of God: "I assure you, unless you change and become as little children, you will not enter the kingdom of God. Whoever makes himself lowly, becoming like this child, is of greatest importance in that heavenly reign. (Mt. 18:3-4; cf. Mk. 10: 15-16). Similarly, in the conversation with Nicodemus (Jn. 3) Jesus speaks of the adult being "born again" or "begotten from above" as the starting point for this growth to childhood. Baptism has carried this idea of initiation into the Way throughout the Christian tradition. But, unfortunately, growth toward childlikeness--dependence upon and likeness to the Father--has often been neglected. And hence, the idea of having to do anything in response to the gift of God, i.e., the obligation to try to live the Christian life, has been neglected in some traditions, in order to emphasize a particular aspect of the theology of grace, viz., "faith alone" or all is from God.

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methods and intentions fail when nature does not come to our aid." The Collected works of Carl Jung. Vol. 10, Civilization in Transition., trans. by R.F.C. Hull, (London: Kegan Paul, 1964) from an article by Jung entitled: "A Psychological View of Conscience", p. 445.

These above terms and ideas signifying repentance-conversion, represent it as a dynamic turning from sin to salvation in Christ, or, with the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11), a turning from sin as a preparation for the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. It is a turning to "life", a preparation for a share in the Kingdom. And like the Jews, the first Christians thought their reward would be imminent. However, they found that it was precisely through waiting for Jesus' Second Coming in the same faithfulness as the Old Testament heroes waited on God, that the ongoing process of conversion or union with Christ was gradually embracing the whole of their person in the whole of their lives. Jesus is the vine which gives life and sustains one during the Father's pruning. And because there is so much work to be done, the message of conversion can be addressed to the Christian at any stage in his or her journey (cf. Rev. Chapters 1-3, the letters to the churches). "You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) is not an overnight process. To certain traditions which would hold for Man's inability to arrive at holiness by any efforts of his own, the New Testament is clear that it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that this is accomplished, but not without the striving on Man's part. And to those traditions who further see salvation as solely dependent on the merits of Christ and independent of Man's efforts, indeed, independent of any change occuring in the person, we must object on both Scriptural as well as anthropological grounds. If there is no real change in the person, then his hope is never reinforced by the experience of inner healing, nor does

s/he ever Christianize the hidden self of the unconscious; nor is their human freedom exercised in the daily following of Christ, in order to become as a "little child" -more and more dependent upon, and trusting in, the Father.

The notion that once a person has asked Christ to be his personal saviour and that He, therefore, will never depart from that person, commonly expressed in the phrase that "one has been saved", we would see as giving testimony to the irrevocable love of God; however, God, although not a respecter of persons, is a respecter of the human nature which he created (else, why are we in the fix we are in?). Hence, it would seem an over-correction of pelagian tendencies and a detriment to human self-understanding to hold such an extreme position.

MacDonald's theology of conversion is in close harmony with the Biblical models. In George MacDonald's theology, conversion is a wilful living for God which itself transforms and further enlightens (by way of experiential knowledge) the subject, creating in him or her a greater willingness to do what God wants and a more deep-rooted relation to the Father in Christ. By doing the will of God from the heart, the gradual struggle to become what he would say we are by the gift of nature itself - "divine"- is achieved.

Hence, for example, in the short story "Birth, Dreaming, Death" (1864), where MacDonald says "any other child is like Christ" he means it. In the story, there is a schoolmaster whose wife is

due to give birth to their first child. He is happy about this, yet, at the same time he is worried that his meagre income will not very well support the three of them. There is a storm raging outside, and while waiting for the birth of the child, he drifts off into a dream. In the dream he hears a knock at the door. When he opens the door amidst the snow he finds a child poorly clad left there. He takes him up in his arms and brings him by the fire, bathes him and in spite of his continued financial worries he feels as if he could not part with the orphan. Suddenly the child looks up at him and says:

> "I am the child Jesus."
>
> "The child Jesus!" said the dreamer, astonished. "Thou art like any other child".
>
> "No, do not say so", returned the boy; "but say any other child is like me."[10]

Although in itself this is not an unusual statement in certain types of devotional literature, yet, for MacDonald it speaks of a likeness between man and God that has yet to come to light, but will with the full flowering of human nature.

In addition to this, George MacDonald had the heart-felt conviction that God would see to the salvation of all of his children and this by their coming to freely choose His will. In all of his novels and short stories he always respects the freedom of his characters in their choices for God, this whether they are

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[10] George MacDonald. "Birth, Dreaming, Death", in the collection The Gifts of the Child Christ: Fairy Tales and Stories for the Childlike, ed. by G.E. Sadler, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1973) vol. 2, p. 254.

alive or dead, such that the very desire to serve Him is gradually born deep within the person's subconscious (the place also where God communes with his children)[11] and perceived by the individual as an enlivening of and enrichment to self; and once perceived in this way, the person freely chooses for God, thus the human mode of operation is respected, as well as the achiev-

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[11] In an essay on the imagination, where MacDonald is comparing the human faculty of the imagination to God's creative "faculty", i.e., in the sense that through the imagination the human being gives form to an idea, he locates the subconscious as the source of inspiration, but in the sense that it is there where God speaks to the person:

> Can it be correct, then to say that he [the man] created them? Nothing less so, as it seems to us. But can we not say that they are the creation of the unconscious portion of his nature? Yes, provided we can understand that that which is the individual, the man, can know, and not know that it knows, can create and yet be ignorant that virtue has gone out of it. From that unknown region we grant they come, but not by its own blind working. Nor, even were it so, could any amount of such production, where no will was concerned, be dignified with the name of creation. But God sits in that chamber of our being in which the candle of our consciousness goes out in darkneses, and sends forth from thence wonderful gifts into the light of that understanding which is His Candle. Our hope lies in no most perfect mechanism even of the spirit, but in the wisdom wherein we live and move and have our being. Thence we hope for endless forms of beauty informed by truth. If the dark portion of our own being were the origin of our imagination, we might well fear the apparition of such monsters as would be generated in the sickness of decay which could never feel - only declare - a slow return towards primeval chaos. But the Maker is our Light. (George MacDonald "The Imagination: Its Function and Culture" (1867). An essay published in Orts, enlarged edition, London: Samson Low Marston & Company, Ltd., no date) pp. 24-25.

One can't help seeing the similarity and differences of thought here between MacDonald's understanding of the human psyche and that of the psychologists Freud and Jung. And although MacDonald doesn't develop a psychology of the unconscious, as they later do, his understanding of "conversion" is based on this model of Man's psyche.

ing God's purpose in Christ - "our salvation".

Because of MacDonald's sensitivity to the relationship between the "human mode" as gift of God in the Creation, and God's purposes revealed in Christ --our sanctification, his notion of conversion as a natural growth process is better treated under the heading of Theological Anthropology rather than conversion. What has been said above, though, about conversion and about MacDonald's theology of conversion, provides a basis for that discussion.

GEORGE MACDONALD'S ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: Growth to Perfection

An "Anthropology of the Christian Life" looks to the commencement and growth of the relationship of the human being with God in Christ. It assumes as a fundamental basis of this relationship the Biblical revelation of the creation of Man "in the image and likeness of God" (Gen. 1:27)[12] and respects this as

[12] This is something which has been the source of various interpretations with regard to when this image and likeness begins and how sin has effaced it; and how it is to be restored. The loss or distortion of the "image and likeness of God" has generally been held as occurring in the Fall of Man. For some of the Fathers, the image was received at birth, for others it was restored in Baptism but the "likeness" was only restored through leading of a virtuous life. Man was left with the "image" but had to regain the "likeness". For example, Clement of Alexandria taught that "some of us, admit it in this way that man receives the image after birth, but the likeness only later, that is after the second perfection" (Strom. 2,23,135).

Likewise, there have been various interpretations as to where in Man this image resides. (For example, the Alexandrians, who were influenced by the gnostics, and who were inclined to noetism, placed God's image in the mind; while Irenaeus, although seeing

the first revelation, so to speak, of God's intentions for the human being. The Fall of Man and his/her need for salvation from sin, which isolates him both from God and from his/her neighbour -from the happiness s/he longs for- is the other great reality of human existence. When we speak of salvation from sin, then, we are at the same time speaking of arriving at a state of freedom to love and be loved without the perverse self-centred, self-defeating attitude which victimizes others and closes us off from the enrichment of their love. Salvation, then, should be understood as a state of being and not simply an end goal. It is a process which culminates in the perfection of love whereby the individual is able to love God and neighbour in such a way that she entrusts herself to God without reservation and she can be trusted with the entrustment of her neighbour without reservation. This is the type of salvation George MacDonald envisaged and taught.

Some of the theology which goes into MacDonald's anthropology of the Christian life is found in the few strictly theological works which he wrote, especially in a late work, a collection of sermon-like commentaries on various Scripture passages called The Hope of the Gospel (1892). However, these, on their own, do not do justice to the power of his thought and spirituality. We

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the place of God's image in Man's mind, said that the soul and body participated in all its effects (Adv. haer. V, 6). But the fact of utmost importance is that human nature is a gift from God, who is Love, and that Man was created in that image and likeness; and that "image and likeness", even though distorted by sin, does still offer a revelation of God (the incarnation of Christ, of course, being the perfect image and revelation of the Father.(Jn. 14: 8-9; Heb. 1:3)

must, therefore, look to his fictional works, for they, like the parables of the Gospel, flesh out in living terms the theoretical. We will try, then, on our part, to cite examples from his writings, both theological and fictional, which shed light on his doctrine. We will also try to show him to be not an isolated theorist, but rather one whose theology is intermingled with many strands of legitimate theology within the Church's tradition. For example, many of his ideas echo the theology of the Greek Fathers with regard to "deification". There is also found a strand of Platonism, again common to the Greek Fathers, and, closer to our own era, to the Cambridge Platonists. This, in regard to the role of moral perfection as uniting us to God through likeness, of human reason being a gift from God which enlightens us back to Him and makes moral choices clear, and of Man being naturally supernatural. He was introduced to some of these ideas through direct reading and to others by way of contemporary authors, but he places his own special stamp on it. As we quoted earlier in chapter one:

> MacDonald's writings are shot through with ideas culled from Maurice, Erskine, [A.J.] Scott, F.W. Robertson, Coleridge and German theologians, but these men's writings should be seen acting on him as dye on a cloth -colours merge- echoes of other hues are visible- but the final mix, the colour, is MacDonald's own.[13]

MacDonald's "own colour" is a tangible unbounded trust and confidence in the Father of Jesus Christ as our very own Father, of His unquestionable goodness, and hence this stimulates a genuine desire to do the will of this wonderfully perceived

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[13] William Raeper. George MacDonald (Herts, England: Lion Publishing plc., 1987) p. 242.

Father as Jesus did.[14] He expresses this in terms which lift the reader to a mystical plane which captivates and reverberates in the reader's subconscious. He emphasizes an ever increasing trust-filled **hope** in the Father brought about through doing the will of the Father which he says is the only genuine faith, and which translates into obedience to what we understand as right by way of our conscience[15] each day, which results in a gradual experiential revelation of the God of Love and an experiential understanding of human fulfillment based on a respect for the original gift of human nature operating freely, i.e., by way of the human mode of acting: freely choosing only that which we perceive as self-enriching. This, in spite of the present state of sinfulness we find ourselves in and, in fact, with a clarity of choice which chooses God in full knowledge of sin, rather than with an unencumbered freedom which rejected Him in Original Innocence.

The human being's freely willing God's Will, which implies a ground of understanding for such a choice, is, for MacDonald, the only true path to human fulfillment and is the uniting theme in his theology of Christian perfection.

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[14] C.S. Lewis, in his preface to his anthology of excerpts from George MacDonald's writings says:

> The Divine Sonship is the key conception which unites all the different elements of his thought....I know hardly any other writer who seems to be closer, or more continually close, to the Spirit of Christ Himself." (George MacDonald, An Anthology by C.S. Lewis, London: Fount Paperbacks, 1990 reprint of 1946 edition published by Geoffrey Bles, London) p. 31.

[15] For a definition of "conscience" see footnote 4 in the previous chapter.

Salvation As Growth of the Inner Self

In The Hope of the Gospel (1892), George MacDonald, in a chapter entitled "Salvation from Sin", gives a rather precise sketch of what he means by "salvation" and how salvation of the individual is brought about. He begins by explaining that "salvation from sin" means to be freed from the very desire to sin, that is, to be freed not simply from the punishment due to sin, but from that distortion within us which is the cause of our sin:

> The one cure for any organism, is to be set right -to have all its parts brought into harmony with each other; the one comfort is to know this cure in process. Rightness alone is cure. The return of the organism to its true self, is its only possible ease. To free a man from suffering, he must be set right, put in health; and the health at the root of man's being, his rightness, is to be free from wrongness, that is, from sin. A man is right when there is no wrong in him. The wrong, the evil is in him; he must be set free from it. I do not mean set free from the sins he has done: that will follow; I mean the sins he is doing, or is capable of doing; the sins in his being whch spoil his nature -the wrongness in him- the evil he consents to; the sin he is, which makes him do the sin he does.... It is the evil in our being -no essential part of it, thank God!... -this is what he came to deliver us from.[16]

This means an actual inner transformation. Here, his theology is substantially the same as the Greek Fathers, who identified salvation with deification -moral perfection or "apatheia" and

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[16] George MacDonald. The Hope of the Gospel (1892) (Whitethorn, California, 1995 reprint of 1st edition of Ward, Lock, Bowden and Co., London) pp. 12-13,17.

transforming union.[17]

> In the Orthodox understanding Christianity signifies not merely an adherence to certain dogmas, not merely exterior imitation of Christ through moral effort, but direct union with the living God, the total transformation of the human person by divine grace and glory - what the Greek Fathers termed "deification" or "divinization" (theosis, theopoiesis). In the words of St. Basil the Great, man is nothing than a creature that has received the order to *become god*. "He was made man that we might be made god," St. Athanasius says of Christ--He became "incarnate" that we might be "ingodded".[18]

> Deification is...the goal of all ascetic and contemplative activity....[it is] Assimilation to God, conferred upon us through intense purification and deep love for God...[19]

For MacDonald, this is the true goal of the Christian life, complete union with God by way of a complete deliverance from the evil that afflicts us. One is intrinsically bound up with the other.

There are three premises upon which MacDonald bases his anthro-

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[17] For example, Clement of Alexandria and Origen understood knowledge of God or Christian gnosis as flowing from union with God through a likeness of goodness. cf. J.N.D. Kelly Early Christian Doctrines fifth revised ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1977) ch. 17.

[18] Georgios I. Mantzaridis. The Deification of Man (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984) p. 7, in the Foreword by Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia.
Likewise, Pelikan, when speaking of the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) says of him that "The chief idea of St. Maximus as of all Eastern Theology, [was] the idea of deification. Like all his theological ideas, it came to him from Christian antiquity and had been formulated by the Greek Fathers." (Pelikan, Vol. 2, p.10)

[19] The Philokalia, ed. by Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware. (London: Faber and Faber, 1995) Vol.4, from a treatise "On Spiritual Knowledge, Love and the Perfection of Living; One Hundred Texts" by Nikitas Stithatos a disciple of Simeon "the new theologian (d. 1022) pp.148-149.

pology: the first is that every human being, by virtue of his inmost nature created in God's "image and likeness" is divine. That the merely human is divine, was for MacDonald based upon God's love and generosity, and even though there is an infinite gulf between a self-existing Creator and His creatures, God loved us into existence as his very children; and hence, as such, we are called to intimate union with God; secondly, and most important subjectively is, that human beings learn from experience and freely make choices toward happiness only in accord with that experience; and thirdly, that growth to perfection is an irrevocable necessity of our nature in God's "image and likeness" who is perfect, and hence, the difficulty which the giving of personal existence creates, namely, that that person, in their freedom, can choose not to have communion with you, is overcome; since ultimately, the human being has no freedom to alter the ontologically given needs of his nature, but only the freedom to search for and discover, and once discovered, to will them.

The First Step: dissatisfaction

In the section on "Religion and Psychology", we spoke of the inner growth principle which seeks the perfection of all the life-enhancing potentials of the individual. It expresses itself in a process of becoming, which is directed or led by this vital principle which appears to be a biological "given" of the human being. Cooperation with, or obedience to, this vital principle brings about the emergence of the inner genuine self and with this, happiness and fulfillment, both on a personal and

interpersonal level. Resistance to, or disobedience to this principle is perceived as self-betrayal and is accompanied by psychic pain, guilt and misery. MacDonald too, acknowledges such a growth principle in Man, but sees it as God dwelling in the very depths of his subconscious being, communicating light and life, constantly aiding him to bring about this inner transformation which enables a communion of love with Himself and with his neighbour:

> God is deeper in us than our own life; yes, God's life is the very centre and creative cause of that life which we call ours;[20]

Both for MacDonald and the Humanistic and Existential Psychologists the beginnings of growth are precipitated by the acknowledgement of unhappiness, be it a crisis or a dissatisfaction with one's present situation. In The Hope of the Gospel he says:

> I presume there is scarce a human being who, resolved to speak openly, would not confess to having something that plagued him, something from which he would gladly be free, something rendering it impossible for him, at the moment, to regard life as an altogether good thing. Most men, I presume, imagine that, free of such and such things antagonistic, life would be an unmingled satisfaction, worthy of being prolonged indefinitely. The causes of their discomfort are of all kinds, and the degrees of it reach from simple uneasiness to a misery such as makes annihilation the highest hope of the sufferer who can persuade himself of its possibility.[21]

He then goes on to list the various possible types of discomfort

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[20] George MacDonald. Salted with Fire (1897) (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1897) p. 325; quoted from George MacDonald and His Wife by Greville MacDonald, opus cit., p. 556.

[21] MacDonald. The Hope of the Gospel opus cit., pp. 9-10.

or misery, but sees them as simply symptoms of the one overarching problem:

> Some, to escape it, leave their natural surroundings behind them, and with strong and continuous effort keep rising in the social scale, to discover at every new ascent fresh trouble, as they think, awaiting them, whereas in truth they have brought the trouble with them. Others, making haste to be rich, are slow to find out that the poverty of their souls, none the less that their purses are filling, will yet keep them unhappy. Some court endless change, nor know that on themselves the change must pass that will set them free. Others expand their souls with knowledge, only to find that content will not dwell in the great house they have built.
>
> To number the varieties of human endeavour to escape discomfort would be to enumerate all the modes of such life as does not know how to live. All seek the thing whose defect appears the **cause** of the misery, and is but the variable **occasion** of it, the cause of the shape it takes, not of the misery itself; for when one apparent cause is removed, another at once succeeds. The real cause of his trouble is a something the man has not perhaps recognized as even distinct; in any case he is not yet acquainted with its true nature.
>
> However absurd the statement may appear to one who has not yet discovered the fact for himself, the cause of every man's discomfort is evil, moral evil -first of all, evil in himself, his own sin, his own wrongness, his own unrightness; and then, evil in those he loves...the only way to get rid of it is for the man to get rid of his own sin.[22]

Moral Evil

To this universal cause of Man's discomfort -moral evil- MacDonald attaches universal laws. He says that suffering always is concomitant with or follows upon evil, and this to achieve or attain "the object for which it is permitted -namely, the

[22] Ibid. pp. 10-11.

development of a pure will in man"[23] for moral goodness. It is this state of "moral goodness" that makes us fit receivers of our neighbour in all his vulnerability and it is this same pure will in Man -the choosing of God's will- which achieves his own perfection, the thing he was meant for by creation. So insistent is MacDonald as to moral evil being the cause of all of Man's suffering that he goes on to make a very Old Testament statement, i.e., that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children, concerning the physical sufferings of some:

> No special sin may be recognizable as having caused this or that special physical discomfort -which may indeed have originated with some ancestor; but evil in ourselves is the cause of its continuance, the source of its necessity, and the preventive of that patience which would soon take from it, or at least blunt its sting.[24]

Knowledge and Morality: Man, the discoverer and learner

In the very outset of The Hope of the Gospel MacDonald makes a statement about coming to know things as they truly are, i.e., objective reality (something much disputed at present), the coming to perceive things from the viewpoint of the creator, upon which hinges MacDonald's understanding of the free relationship between God and his creation:

> Everything in the world is more or less misunderstood at first: we have to learn what it is, and come at

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[23] Ibid. p. 11. "these consequences [suffering] exist by the one law of the universe, the true will of the Perfect. That broken, that disobeyed by the creature, disorganization renders suffering inevitable; it is the natural consequence of the unnatural..." Ibid. p. 14.

[24] Ibid. p.11.

> length to see that it must be so, that it could not be otherwise. Then we know it; and we never know a thing **really** until we know it thus.[25]

The human being's search for meaning within creation implies such a search for these deep understandings; and, in fact, for MacDonald, Man is the seeker, the discoverer. When he defines the human imagination, a faculty which he held in the highest esteem, it is not its creativity which he praises so much as its power to discover.[26] In his novel Thomas Wingfold, Curate (1876), there is a young woman (Helen Lindgard) who is beginning to think, i.e., to have thoughts and ideas of her own and not simply the opinion of others and of society. In fact, she was on the verge of "making the unpleasant [for her in her present state] discovery that the business of life -and that not only for north-pole expeditions, African explorers, pyramid inspectors, and such like, but for every man and woman born into the blindness of the planet, is to discover..."[27]

As we discover and gain insights into what a thing or situation is, and what it means in relation to us -to being human, our new understanding affects our behaviour as we seek to fulfill our ontological need to be happy to the very depths of our being. As we understand things, so do we act. For example, even when a

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[25] George MacDonald. The Hope of the Gospel (1892), opus cit., p. 9.

[26] See the detailed analysis of "imagination" in MacDonald's thought in the chapter on myth and imagination above.

[27] George MacDonald. Thomas Wingfold, Curate (1876) (Whitehorn, California: Johannesen, 1996 reprint of 1887 4th edition by Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., London) p. 3.

person commits suicide they are doing it to escape a misery which is presently perceived as worse than death. We all long for happiness and we search for it. When life becomes uncomfortable we seek to change things. Gradually we realize two things in relation to happiness: first, that we long to love "with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to be loved completely and unconditionally. Secondly, that the one and only thing that enables us for such love is moral perfection -- goodness, for it makes us capable for such giving and receiving.

MacDonald identifies three aspects of living which lead to the knowledge of "things as they are and can't possibly be otherwise", knowledge which commands our will and which leads to moral growth. The first of these is "suffering"; the second is "obedience"; and the third is "failure".

The Ministry of Suffering

In the last chapter we spoke of the "hidden face of suffering" and we don't wish to repeat that here. Rather we wish to examine suffering from the perspective of learning. Suffering acts as a curative and as a teacher of what to avoid or awakens one to search anew for happiness. In his novel What's Mine's Mine (1886) MacDonald defends the usefulness of suffering against those who think that there are always other ways to move people:

> There are tender-hearted people who virtually object to the whole scheme of creation; they would neither have force used nor pain suffered; they talk as if kindness could do everything, even where it is not felt. Millions of human beings but for suffering would

> never develop an atom of affection. The man who would spare **due** suffering is not wise. It is folly to conclude a thing ought not to be done because it hurts. There are powers to be born, creations to be perfected, sinners to be redeemed, through the ministry of pain, that could be born, perfected, redeemed, in no other way.[28]

Likewise, in his novel Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood (1867) he tells us:

> When people want to walk their own way without God, God lets them try it. And then the devil gets a hold of them. But God won't let him keep them. As soon as they are "wearied in the greatness of their way," they begin to look about for a Saviour. And then they find God ready to pardon, ready to help, not breaking the bruised reed -leading them to his own self manifest - with whom no man can fear any longer, Jesus Christ, the righteous lover of men -their elder brother- what we call "big brother", you know -one to help them and take their part against the devil, the world, and the flesh, and all the rest of the wicked powers. So you see God is tender -just like the prodigal son's father- only with this difference, that God has millions of prodigals, and never gets tired of going out to meet them and welcome them back, every one as if he were the only prodigal son He had ever had. There's a father indeed![29]

The lack of due suffering can cause even good people to stagnate. MacDonald expresses this in the fantasy novel Lilith (1895). In this novel we meet the "Lovers". They are a group of innocent children who never grow up. They share the land with the "Bags", brute-like adults. The protagonist of the novel, Mr. Vane, wanders into the land and soon makes friends with the "Lovers". Within a few days, however, he is captured by the "Bags", who put him in chains and make him work for them in their orchard. Mr. Vane could quite easily oppose them for his

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[28] George MacDonald. What's Mine's Mine (1886) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1911) pp. 71-72. Note that he is speaking in cases where kindness is not felt.

[29] George MacDonald. Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood (1867) (London: Alexander Strahan & Co., 1868) p. 263.

senses, his reflexes, and his intelligence are far superior to theirs. Yet, he submits to them for fear that if violence breaks out the "Lovers" might get involved and be hurt.

Mr. Vane is later criticized by his mentor, Adam, for not having done anything to help them to grow. Firstly, by not having given them a moral example by opposing the "Bags", this, through a false sense of keeping the "Lovers" safe; and, in so doing also doing a disservice to the "Bags" themselves by not opposing their brutish ways and so teaching them. Secondly, by not giving them water. There had been a severe drought in the country for years and there were no streams or lakes or rain. The lovers survive on fruit from which they gain all their nourishment. Adam admonishes Mr. Vane:

> but you saw they were not growing--or growing so slowly that they had not yet developed the idea of growing! They were even afraid of growing! -you had never seen children remain children!....You might have removed some of the hindrances to their growing.
>
> What are they? I do not know them. I did think perhaps it was the want of water!
>
> Of course it is! <u>they have none to cry with!</u>
>
> I would gladly have kept them from requiring any for that purpose!
>
> No doubt you would--the aim of all stupid philanthropists! Why, Mr. Vane, but for the weeping in it, your world would never have become worth saving! You confess it might be water they wanted: why did you not dig them a well or two?
>
> That never entered my mind!
>
> Not when the sounds of the water under the earth entered your ears?
>
> I believe I did once. But I was afraid of the giants for them. That was what made me bear so much from the brutes myself!

> Indeed you almost taught the noble little creatures to be afraid of the stupid Bags! While they fed and comforted and worshipped you, all the time you submitted to be the slave of bestial men! You gave the darlings a seeming coward for their hero! A worse wrong you could hardly have done them. They gave you their hearts; you owed them your soul!--You might by this time have made the Bags hewers of wood and drawers of water to the Little Ones!....You lost your chance with the Lovers, Mr. Vane! You speculated about them instead of helping them![30]

Mr. Vane had failed them by not confronting evil because of the pain and sorrow and danger it might cause the little ones. In so doing he left them to stagnate, and even become cowards themselves after his own example.

For MacDonald, suffering, is a teacher. And the purpose of this entire life (and for many people, if not all, in a portion of the next) is the learning of who we are and who God is in relation to us. For it is through the knowledge of this reality which literally necessitates a choice for God.[31] For once we know

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[30] George MacDonald. Lilith (1895) opus cit., ch. 28 (pp. 147-148).

[31] "One master-sin is at the root of all the rest....it is the non-recognition by the man, and the consequent inactivity in him, of the highest of all relations, the relation which is the root and first essential condition of every other true relation of or in the human soul. It is the absence in the man of harmony with the being whose thought is the man's existence, whose word is the man's power of thought. It is true, being thus his offspring, God, as St. Paul affirms, cannot be far from any one of us: were we not in closest contact of creating and created, we could not exist; as we have in us no power to be, so have we none to continue being: but there is a closer contact still, as absolutely necessary to our well-being and highest existence, as the other to our being at all, to the mere capacity of faring well or ill. For the highest creation in man is his will, and until the highest in man meets the highest in God, their true relation is not yet a spiritual fact. The flower lies in the root, but the root is not the flower. The relation exists, but while one of the parties neither knows, loves, nor acts upon it,

something truly or "really", our choice becomes so clear that we have no freedom to judge it otherwise according to our nature which seeks happiness in the reality of entire existence, and not just in our mind or imagination or our bodies, but in the totality of our being. When we are faced with that which will achieve this goal, we are powerless to refuse -we are willing captives of our own ontology.

Failure

In chapter II, on "Myth", the Princess Rosamund and her encounter with the Wise Woman was discussed. It was only when the princess had failed her first two trials in the "mood chambers" that she was so disgusted with herself that she asks the Wise Woman if she couldn't help her. She responds:

> "Perhaps I could, now you ask me"....
>
> "I am very tired of myself," said the princess. "But I can't rest til I try again."
>
> "That is the only way to get rid of your weary, shadowy self, and find your strong, true self. Come, my child; I will help you all I can, for now I can help you."[32]

This being "tired of oneself" and the need to "try again" lead to an openness, a humility which breaks us free from our

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the relation is, as it were, yet unborn. The highest in man is neither his intellect nor his imagination nor his reason; all are inferior to his will, and indeed, in a grand way, dependent upon it: his will must meet God's -a will **distinct** from God's, else were no harmony possible between them. Not the less, therefore, but the more, is all God's. For God creates in man the power to will his Will....when he [the man] is brought to that point, and declares for the truth, that is, for the will of God, he becomes one with God, and the end of God in the man's creation...is gained. The Hope of the Gospel, opus cit., pp. 19-20.

[32] George MacDonald. "The Wise Woman", opus cit., ch. 13.

isolation and opens us to the truth about ourselves, our need for others, and ultimately our need for actual communion with God and neighbour.

The "Twelve Steps", as they are called, of Alcoholics Anonymous are based on the experience of failure and give living testimony to the authenticity of this aspect of learning and growing:

> 1-We admitted we were powerless over alcohol -that our lives had become unmanageable.
>
> 2-Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
>
> 3-Made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
>
> 4-Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
>
> 5-Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
>
> 6-Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
>
> 7-Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
>
> 8-Made a list of all the persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
>
> 9-Made direct amends to such people as wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
>
> 10-Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
>
> 11-Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.
>
> 12-Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our

affairs.[33]

The movement from a knowledge of our own weakness to the crying out for help; and then the moral renovation and sharing of that help which these principles speak, embody what we are trying to say about growth through failure. Failure frees us from the isolation of pride. It teaches us about our weakness and our need and impels us to reach beyond ourselves. It helps us to understand things as they are and as they must be.

In the novel Guild Court (1868), MacDonald tells the story of a rather ordinary young man who has a surface understanding of religion (in fact, he teaches Sunday School), comes from a fairly well to do family and looks as if there is nothing to move him out of his mediocrity. He is a coward in relation to his family -especially his father's wishes with regard to whom he should marry- and hides from them his true feelings for a girl with less money and connections. In a confused effort to, perhaps, please his father and also for the simple pleasure of flirtation, he shows attention to the girl his father favours (the daughter of family friends) but later avoids her causing her much hurt and pain. (Later, her family take her on a cruise to get over it and all are lost in a storm at sea, requiring tremendous faith on the part of the reader to see such tragedy in the light of a God who must be able to repair all things, otherwise how could we bear the responsibility and guilt of such

[33] From a leaflet, reprinted with permission, by the A.A. Grapevine, Inc., copyright 1947, A.A. General Services Office, Stonebow, York.

happenings.)

It is only when the double revelation of his own weakness for gambling (although even in this he was led astray by an unsavory friend) where he takes an advance on his own salary from the company safe without asking (becoming a thief); and loses his beloved's ring in a card game, that he is forced to come face to face with his own wretchedness. Initially, he doesn't think that anyone can help him, that is, he believes himself beyond help. He knows he must leave behind his former life and drop out of sight. It is here that this ordinary person and his life begins to attract the reader, both through compassion and through curiosity. MacDonald says:

> I flatter myself that my reader is not very interested in Thomas; I never meant he should be yet. I confess, however, that I am now girding up my loins with the express intention of beginning to interest him if I can. For I have now almost reached the point of his history which I myself feel on the verge of the interesting. When a worthless fellow begins to meet with his deserts, then we begin to be aware of that after all he is our own flesh and blood. Our human heart begins to feel just the least possible yearning toward him. We hope he will be well trounced, but we become capable of hoping that it may not be lost upon him.[34]

On his way into hiding, however, a providential incident takes place which opens a new path of life for him. He is on a boat being rowed down the Thames and it passes a large group of boats full of men and women. They were there watching a rowing race of their own people. On one of these boats observing the race is a woman who is holding a toddler. The boat she is on is struck by

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[34] George MacDonald. Guild Court (1868) (Whitehorn California: Johannesen, 1992 reprint of 1886 edition by Routledge & Sons, New York) ch. 38, (p.249).

a neighbouring one and the child in her arms falls into the water. "Thomas was gazing listlessly at the water...he saw a child sweep passed him a foot or so below the surface"[35]. Without thinking, he jumps in and saves the child. The river-folk are grateful and admiring of his quick thinking and courage, and soon become his friends. From them he obtains employment on a ship carrying cargo along the British coast.

At this time, MacDonald tells us that Thomas despised himself and he sees this as a real beginning, curing him of pride:

> it was the first necessity of a nature like his to be taught to look down on himself. As long as he thought himself more than somebody, no good was to be expected of him. Therefore it was well for him that the worthlessness of his character should break out and show itself in some plainly worthless deed [his theft and gambling Lucy's ring], that he might no longer be able to hide himself from the conviction and condemnation of his own conscience. Hell had come at last; and he burned in its fire.[36]

But hope was not withheld from him. He had a natural aptitude toward sailing, and seasickness was unknown to him. During a storm at sea, "the Father who had not forgotten his erring child" spoke to him through the storm which "did harmonize with his troubled mind. New strength, even hope, invaded his weary heart from the hiss of the wind through the cordage as it bellied the masts"[37]. With this hope came the courage to live and work and he was soon making humble progress toward honesty and

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[35] Ibid. pp. 253-254.

[36] Ibid. ch. 43 (p. 311).

[37] Ibid. (p. 312). The love and harmony between Man's moods and nature are often evident in MacDonald. Nature is but the "garment of God" and has a healing and ennobling effect.

goodness through the truth about himself and the friendship he received from his new friends.

About the original "chance happening", the courageous saving of the child, which was the door to Thomas' rebirth, MacDonald ponders on with regard to God's ubiquitous Providence both outside our lives -that is, the exterior happenings, as well as the interior thoughts and inspirations. He asks the question:

> What made him, who has been shown all but incapable of originating a single action, thus at the right moment do the one right thing? Here arises another question: Does a man **always** originate his own actions? Is it not possible, to say the least of it, that, just to give him a taste of what well-doing means, some moment, when selfishness is sick and faint, may be chosen by the power in whom we live and move and have our being to inspire the man with a true impulse? We must think what an unspeakable comfort it must have been to Thomas, in these moments of hopeless degradation of which he felt all the bitterness, suddenly to find around him, as the result of a noble deed into which he had been unaccountably driven, a sympathetic, yes, admiring public....he could not help feeling the present power of humanity, the healing medicine of approbation....I say **medicine** ...for what would have been to him in ordinary, a poison [feeding his pride], was now a medicine....
>
> It may be objected that the deed originated only in a carelessness of life resulting from self-contempt. I answer, that no doubt that had its share in making the deed possible, because it removed for the time all that was adverse to such a deed; but self despite, however true and well-grounded, cannot inspirit to true and noble action. I think it was the divine, the real self, aroused at the moment by the breath of that wind which bloweth where it listeth, that sprung thus into life and deed, shadowing...that wonderful saying of our Lord that he that loseth his life shall find it.[38]

Here we get a glimpse at the wonderful confidence MacDonald has in God's care for us and some of the factors that go into the

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[38] Ibid. ch. 38 (p. 256).

inexorable fact of our redemption. God dwells within us as the root of being influencing our "real self" , the "divine self" made in God's image and likeness, which acts as a traitor within to our false self-seeking isolated self. On top of this, all external happenings are of his making and work to our humbling and encouragement. Within this all-embracing care, freedom to reject God is perhaps the greatest delusion which we suffer from.

Several months later Thomas returns to London hoping to see Lucy once more: to apologize to her, return her ring, which he was able to recover, and then leave for Australia. He writes a note to this effect, but, upon seeking to deliver it he is taken captive by some of the local shopkeepers of Guild Court, who bring him to Mr. Fuller, Lucy's and her grandmother's clergyman, who was seeking him to ask his intercession with his father concerning some property which had come into his [Thomas' father's] hands to the detriment of Lucy's grandmother and Lucy. To these entreaties, Thomas explains his own predicament and how he hasn't seen his father for months. He confesses all to Mr. Fuller, who in his kindness seeks to help Thomas. Their conversation offers insights into MacDonald's understanding of the disgrace of failure and of the change that that brings about, and of God's forgiveness:

> He did not utter a word of reproof...."we must get you out of this scrape, somehow," he said, heartily.
>
> "I don't see how you can, sir."
>
> "It rests with yourself, chiefly. Another can only help. The feet that walked into the mire must turn and walk out of it again. I don't mean to reproach you -

only to encourage you to effort."

"What effort?" said Tom. "I have scarcely heart for anything. I have disgraced myself forever. Suppose all the consequences of my -- doing as I did" --he could not yet call the deed by its name-- "were to disappear, I have a blot upon me to all eternity, that nothing can wash out. For there is the fact. I almost think it not worth while doing anything."

"You are altogether wrong about that," returned Mr. Fuller. "It is true that the deed is done, and that that cannot be obliterated. But a living soul may outgrow all stain and all reproach -- I don't mean in the judgment of men merely, but in the judgment of God, which is always founded on the actual fact, and always calls things by their right names, and covers no man's sin, although he forgives it and takes it away. A man may abjure his sin so, cast it away from him so utterly, with pure heart and full intent, that although he did it, it is his no longer. But, Thomas Worboise, if the stain of it were to cleave to you to all eternity, that would be infinitely better than that you should have continued capable of doing the thing. You are more honorable now than you were before. Then you were capable of the crime; now, I trust, you are not. It was far better that, seeing your character was such that you could do it, you should thus be humbled by disgracing yourself, than that you should have gone on holding up a proud head in the world, with such a deceitful hollow of weakness in your heart. It is the kindest thing God can do for his children, sometimes, to let them fall into the mire. You would not hold by your Father's hand; you struggled to pull it away; he let it go, and there you lay. Now that you stretch forth the hand to him again, he will take you, and clean, not your garments only, but your heart, and soul, and consciousness. Pray to your Father my boy. He will change your humiliation into humility, your shame into purity."[39] (my emphasis)

Failure, for Thomas Worboise, was full of revelation about himself and his shortcomings. Its pain and misery led to an inner change. It necessitated his seeking a path full of communication and communion with others. It led him to truth and to a conviction of the need for obedience to truth.

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[39] Ibid. ch. 46 (pp. 329-330).

Obedience-the slow process of growth

"By obedience, I intend no kind of obedience to man, or submission to authority claimed by man or community of men. I mean obedience to the Father, however revealed in our conscience"[40]

This obedience to the Father as revealed in our conscience is for MacDonald the essence of "faith" and the only way to co-operative growth. And through the doing of what is revealed in conscience comes a connatural understanding of this Will. The awakening of the conscience, then, is the beginning and must lead to action, for mere speculation upon what ought to be done is useless, for it yields no deeper understanding[41]. Likewise, once the duty of one's conscience is lived, understanding and changes of attitude occur which yield more light to be acted upon. In this way the person is slowly transformed into the likeness of Christ, yet ever retaining their personal uniqueness which more and more is in harmony and union with God. Owing obedience only to conscience also frees the person to discover for themselves whether societal, cultural, religious, and family norms are indeed leading to moral goodness and true happiness or are simply entrapments to a safe uniformity. For MacDonald, these various social structures, ideally ought to seek to

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[40] George MacDonald. The Hope of the Gospel (1892), opus cit., p. 24. For a definition of "conscience" see footnote 4 in chap. 3 above.

[41] Speculation may reveal aspects of the situation which were previously unnoticed, however a deeper understanding can only come through greater likeness, and that comes about through participation.

support the individuals' search for truth rather than lay stumbling blocks of conditional love.

But what awakens the human conscience to seek obedience to truth? It is often simply the pain of necessity:

> When misery drives a man to call out to the source of his life,--and I take the increasing outcry against existence as a sign of the growth of the race-- the answer, I think, will come in a quickening of his conscience.[42]

And although this is not what the person expected as an answer to his or her cry, as the ridding of their suffering was what was hoped for, yet MacDonald is adamant that the suffering must last until the inner moral evil with which it is intermingled has been dealt with: "This [deliverance from his suffering] he cannot have, save in being delivered from its essential root, a thing infinitely worse than any suffering it can produce."[43] Suffering is an unrelenting adversary:

> Through the chastisement he will at last take the only way that leads into liberty of that which is and must be. There can be no deliverance but to come out of his evil dream into the glory of God.[44]

It is an inexorable process, an irrevocable decree of God's love for his children, that all shall be saved by being freed from evil, by whatever is necessary to help the person freely reject sin and begin to choose good -even hell.

> For hell is God's and not the devil's. Hell is on the side of God and man, to free the child of God from the

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[42] The Hope of the Gospel, opus cit., p. 13.

[43] Ibid. pp. 13-14.

[44] Ibid. p. 14.

> corruption of death. Not one soul will ever be redeemed from hell but by being saved from his sins, from the evil in him. If hell be needful to save him, hell will blaze and the worm will writhe and bite, until he takes refuge in the will of the Father.[45]

The awakening of the conscience is the beginning, and once the conscience is awakened the path to the deliverance from moral evil is cleared; and then it must be followed according to the person's own lights. Being told what to do is of no use. One must simply "do that which you know is right and then further light will ensue"[46] It is a matter then, of simple honesty and of living. In contrast to this simplicity, he says of the "wise and prudent of this world":

> Even when they know their duty, they must take it to pieces, and consider the grounds of its claims before they will render it obedience. All those evil doctrines about God that work misery and madness, have their origin in the brains of the wise and prudent, not in the hearts of the children....[The wise and prudent] interpret the great heart of God, not by their own hearts, but by their miserable intellects; and, postponing the obedience which alone can give the power to the understanding, press upon men's minds their wretched interpretations of the will of the Father, instead of the doing of that will upon their hearts....[47]

The knowlege of the heart -loving knowledge, and as such, a knowledge through union and likeness- is the only true interpreter of God's will. The individual must freely discern it for themselves by way of its unique expression in their life circumstances. To many, such freedom for their neighbour is a

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[45] Ibid. pp. 15-16. See chap. I above for MacDonald's understanding of "Hell".

[46] "Human Development" in Orts opus cit..

[47] Ibid. pp. 147-148.

thing to be feared, especially in church circles. It is often criticized on the grounds of it leading to a lack of unity and conformity, of confusion, etc.. But, in reality, isn't it the showing of the greatest respect and charity to our neighbour by allowing him or her the freedom to adhere to the truth which they understand and hence to grow and develop without repression? Isn't it really the imitation of the Father who allows the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the good and bad alike -since he loves both? Those who would force others to believe as they do are men and women of violence. They fear anything different from themselves. MacDonald, who himself suffered from those who insisted on Church uniformity over the freedom of the individual, expressed it in these terms:

> what shall I say of such as, in the name of religion, let their darkness out--the darkness of worshipped opinion, the darkness of lip-honour and disobedience! Such are those who tear asunder the body of Christ with the explosives of dispute, on the plea of such a unity as alone they can understand, namely a paltry uniformity. What have not the "good churchman" and the "strong disenter" to answer for, who, hiding what true light they have, if indeed they have any, under the bushel of his party-spirit, radiate only repulsion! There is no schism, none whatever, in using diverse forms of thought or worship: true honesty is never schismatic. The real schismatic is the man who turns away love and justice from the neighbour who holds theories in religious philosophy, or as to church-constitution, different from his own; who denies or avoids his brother because he follows not with him; who calls him schismatic because he prefers this or that mode of public worship not his. The other may be schismatic; he himself certainly is.[48]

As to the fear that there will be no standards left and that even knowing what to do might become a nebulous affair, Mac-

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[48] Ibid. pp. 172-173.

Donald is adamant with the firmness that comes from a deep trust in the nature God gave us to seek its Father and be guided back to Him, and, to be protected by that Father in the search. In the novel Castle Warlock one of his characters quotes the Proverb so much employed by the Cambridge Platonists, "Dinna ye ken 'at the speerit o' man 's the can'le o' the Lord?" and for those who follow it they should be confident that "Even sud they stummle, they sanna fa'"[49]. This bespeaks a confidence in God and the creature which allows search and doubt, and even mistakes within that search, without fear of disaster.

In the novel Robert Falconer he explains this way of growth in God's Life through a conversation between the protagonist, the Christ-like Robert Falconer, and the wealthy Lady Georgina. She is perhaps in her twenties, from a very ancient family, tall and "very handsome....She had very sloping shoulders and a long neck, which took its finest curves when she was talking to inferiors."[50] She is undergoing an existential crisis. At this point in the novel, Falconer, always in search of his wayward father, spends a good deal of his time in the slums of London. He has trained initially in medicine and then as need arose, in law. Lady Georgina has heard of him and of his work, and of his unique personality. She herself has become tired of life -she wonders if it has anything to offer -she is bored:

She was, if not blasee, at least ennuyee, and began to

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[49] George MacDonald. Castle Warlock (1882), opus cit., ch. 6 (p.33).

[50] George MacDonald. Robert Falconer (1868), opus cit., Part 3, ch. 10 (p.400).

> miss excitement, and feel blindly about her for something to make life interesting.[51]

Having heard "strange, wonderful, even romantic stories about him", she pays Falconer a visit.

> "From the little I have seen, and the much I have heard of you -excuse me, Mr. Falconer- I cannot help thinking that you know more of the secret of life than other people --if indeed it has a secret"
>
> "Life certainly is no burden to me," returned Falconer. "If that implies the possession of any secret which is not common property, I fear it also involves a natural doubt whether such secret be communicable"
>
> "Of course I mean some secret everybody ought to know"
>
> "I do not misunderstand you"
>
> "I want to live....I need not tell you what kind of life a girl like myself leads. I am not old, but the gilding is worn off. Life looks bare, ugly, uninteresting. I ask you to tell me whether there is any reality in it or not; whether its past glow was only gilt; whether the best that can be done is to get through with it as fast as possible?"[52]

With such questions she embodies her complaints, complaints common to many people. Falconer replies:

> if there be a truth or a heart in life, assurance of the fact can only spring from harmony with that truth. It is not to be known save by absolute contact with it; and the sole guide in the direction of it must be duty: I can imagine no other possible conductor. We must do before we know.[53]

The "doing in order to know", of "duty" is the key he offers her to life's growth. He echoes this throughout his works and is itself the echo of the Gospel where the hearing and doing the

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[51] Ibid. (p.401).

[52] Ibid. (p. 402).

[53] Ibid.

will of the Father is the distuishing mark of those who love God. It is the embodiment of the person who builds his house on rock. She then asks:

> But what is one's duty? There is the question.
>
> "The thing that lies next to you, of course. You are, and must remain the sole judge of that. Another cannot help you"
>
> "But that is just what I do not know"[54]

MacDonald felt that she, as all of us, do have an inkling of what that duty is, for it gnaws at our peace, but, will not look firmly at our own suspicion.

Their conversation continues in which she tells him she has some interest in the "elevation of the lower classes" and has heard that he does that and perhaps she could join him or assist him financially, etc., etc.. This leads to a lengthy conversation about social justice which we will continue below in the section of that title. When they finally return to how to know one's duty, he refers her to her own heart, a heart which must come into harmony with the Heart which created it in order to understand. She has just been telling him how she once loved music but now, even this has lost its joy.

> "How can you enjoy music, Lady Georgina, if you are not in harmony with the heart and source of music?"
>
> "How do you mean?"
>
> "Until the human heart knows the divine heart, it must sigh and complain like a petulant child, who flings his toys from him because his mother is not at home. When his mother comes back to him he finds his toys are good still. When we find Him in our own hearts, we

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[54] Ibid. p. 403.

shall find him in everything, and music will be deep enough then, Lady Georgina. It is this that the Brahmin and the Platonist seek; it is this that the mystic and the anchorite sigh for; towards this the teaching of the greatest men would lead us: Lord Bacon himself says, 'Nothing can fill, much less extend the soul of man, but God, and the contemplation of God.' It is Life you want. If you will look in your New Testament, and find out all that our Lord says about Life, you will find the only cure for your malady. I know what such talk looks like; but depend upon it, what I am talking about is something very different from what you fancy it. Anyhow to this you must one day come, one day or other."

"But how am I to gain this indescribable good, which so many seek, and so few find?"

"Those are not my words," said Falconer emphatically. "I should have said--"'which so few yet seek; but so many shall at length find.'"

"Do not quarrel with my foolish words, but tell me how I am to find it; for I suppose there must be something in what so many good people assert"

"You thought I could give you help?"

"Yes. That is why I came to you."

"Just so. I cannot give you help. Go and ask it of one who can."

"Speak more plainly."

"Well then: if there be a God, he must hear you if you call to him. If there be a father, he will listen to his child. He will teach you everything."

"But I don't know what I want."

"He does: ask him to tell you what you want. It all comes back to the old story: 'If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him!' But I wish you would read your New Testament--the Gospels I mean: you are not in the least fit to understand the Epistles yet[55]. Read the

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[55] In a letter to his father dated April 29, 1853, MacDonald says of the Epistles in relation to the Gospel: "leave the Epistles and ponder **The Gospel**--the story about Christ. Infinitely are the Epistles mistaken because the Gospels are not understood and felt in the heart: because the readers of the Epistles too often possess nothing of that sympathy with Christ's

> story of our Saviour as if you had never read it before. He at least was a man who seemed to have that secret of life after the knowledge of which your heart is longing."[56]

There is one other advice that Falconer gave her in relation to doing good for others, and that was the absolute need for person to person contact, leading to genuine human relations, and from these to discern and offer help where you can. To help in any other way, he felt, did actual harm to their moral progress. But to operate in such an individual fashion, when material resources were available requires a trust in the Father and a connatural understanding of His ways. This trust develops as the person is obedient to the voice of conscience and does the will of the Father, for there grows a trust based on this experiential interchange. MacDonald was amazingly harmonious and consistent in his teachings. His social doctrine reflects this.

Social doctrine

In conversations between Robert Falconer and Lady Georgina; and between Falconer and a young man, Mr. Gordon, who has gotten to know him and now occasionally helps him in his work, we get a glimpse of what MacDonald's Christian Social Doctrine entails. With regard to helping the poor as a Christian he tells Lady

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thoughts and feelings and desires which moved and glorified the writers of the Epistles. The Epistles are very different from the Apostles' preaching; they are mostly written for a peculiar end and aim, and are not intended as expositions of the central truth. (quoted form George MacDonald and His Wife by Greville MacDonald, Opus cit., p. 184).

[56] George MacDonald. Robert Falconer, opus cit., pp.408-409.

Georgina that the poor must be approached in a natural human way:

> Not under any circumstances could I consent to make use of you before you had brought yourself into genuine relations with some of them first.[57]

To his insistance on personal relations, she queries whether societies are "of no use whatsoever!". He responds by saying:

> In as far as any of the persons they employ fulfil the the conditions of which I have spoken, they are useful--that is, just in as far as they come into genuine human relations with those whom they would help. In as far as their servants are incapable of this, the societies are hurtful.[58]

He then goes on to say that the chief good of societies is of a political nature, namely: "the procuring of simple justice for the poor. This is what they need at the hands of the nation, and what they do not receive". To this extent he and his friend F.D. Maurice were in agreement. Where he differed from Maurice was Maurice's optimism with regard to social reform actually changing the moral character of the nation. Maurice sought to rally political reform around the state church -the Church of England, and through "Christian Socialism", a term which he coined, he sought to create a Christian ambience. His concern was more the Church's relation to God, while MacDonald's was the individual's relation to God, with societal and political change coming about through a gradual leavening. Maurice felt that a charitable corporate environment would be an incentive to religious faith, whereas MacDonald saw such "charity" as

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[57] Ibid. p. 406.

[58] Ibid.

actually damaging to moral growth;[59] for which, "only [personal] relations with individuals --none with classes" will do. He seeks to help them out of love for their humanity.

> What I want first is to be their friend, and then to be at length recognized as such. It is only in rare cases that I seek the acquaintance of any of them: I let it come naturally. I bide my time. Almost never do I offer assistance. I wait til they ask it, and then often refuse the sort they want. The worst thing you can do for them is attempt to save them from the natural consequences of wrong: you may sometimes help them out of them. But it is right to do many things for them when you know them, which it would not be right to do for them until you know them.[60]

Another conversation which gives us insight into MacDonald's view of Christians undertaking social action is occasioned by Falconer and Gordon finding two young children outside of a gin parlour where their mother has just died. Falconer inquires after her but is unable to find out if there is anyone to care for the children. He decides to take them to shelter for the time being leaving his name and address with the proprietor of the parlour. He then brings the children to a friend of his (Mary St. John) to look after them. This prompts Gordon to ask Falconer if he and Miss St. John are part of a society working

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[59] Ibid. MacDonald felt that society as a whole, both secular and religious had failed the poor in relation to helping them to grow morally. With regard to secular help he says: "The best notion civilization seems to have is -not to drive out the demons, but to drive out the possessed; to take from them the poor refuges they have, and crowd them into deeper and more fetid hells--to make room for what?--more and more temples in which Mammon may be worshipped." What we would call "urban development" today.
With regard to religious he says that: "The good people, on the other hand, invade them with foolish tracts, that lie against God; or give their money to build churches where there is as yet no people that will go to them." Ibid., p. 417.

[60] Ibid. p. 407.

for the poor:

Are you a society then?

No. At least we don't use the word. And certainly no other society would acknowledge us.

What are you then?

Why should we be anything, so long as we do our work?

Don't you think there is some affectation in refusing a name?

Yes, if the name belongs to you? Not otherwise.

Do you lay claims to no epithet of any sort?

We are a church, if you like. There!

Who is your clergyman?

Nobody.

Where do you meet?

Nowhere.

What are your rules then?

We have none.

What makes you a church?

Divine Service.

What do you mean by that?

The sort of thing you have seen tonight.

What is your creed?

Christ Jesus.

What do you believe about him?

What we can. We count any belief <u>in</u> him--the smallest--better than any belief about him -the greatest- [or] about anything else besides....
Well, then: we are an undefined company of people, who have grown into human relations with each other naturally, through one attractive force -love for human beings, regarding them as human beings only in virtue of the divine in them.

But you must have some rules....

None whatever. They would cause us only trouble. We have nothing to take us from our work. Those that are not earnest, draw most together; those that are on the outskirts have only to do nothing, and they are free of us. But we do sometimes ask people to help us--not with money.

But who are the **we**?

Why **you**, if you will do anything, and I and Miss St. John, and twenty others--and a great many more I don't know, for everyone is a centre for others. It is our work that binds us together.

Then when that stops you drop to pieces?

Yes, thank God. We shall then die. There will be no corporate body--which means a bodied body, or an unsouled body, left behind to simulate life, and corrupt, and work no end of disease. We go to ashes at once, and leave no corpse for a ghoul to inhabit and make a vampire of. When our spirit is dead, our body is vanished.

Then you won't last long.

Then we oughtn't last long.

But the work of the world could not go on so.

We are not the life of the world. God is. And when we fail, he can and will send out more and better labourers into his harvest field. It is a divine accident by which we are associated.[61]

MacDonald applies the same "freedom of the individual" to that of those working together: "we have no rules"; and the motive for their work: service to the divine, by virtue of their very humanity, imparts a dignity to one's neighbour which bespeaks a sacredness that only love should approach. He has confidence in God and therefore he "bides his time", not seeking out particular people, not offering help, etc., he trusts in God's providence and his own openness, by way of his conscience

[61] Ibid. pp. 388-389.

looking to do whatever duty comes to its awareness, as the director of his work. There is no "institution" to either rely upon or to worship in the place of God.

MacDonald's social doctrine requires faith --an abandonment of trust in the goodness and hidden workings and providence of God which entails a connatural understanding of the deep approaches by which the God of love is rendering his children loveable. In his novel Weighed and Wanting, upon seeing the plight of the poor in a mother and child which were both barely alive, he explains that Hester, who was wondering "whether God was good":

> had yet to learn that the love of God is so deep he can be satisfied with nothing less than getting as near as it is possible for the Father to draw nigh to his children--and that is an absolute contact of heart with heart, love with love, being with being. And as that must be wrought out from the deepest inside, divine law working itself up through our nature into our consciousness and will, and claiming us as divine, who can tell by what slow certainties of approach God is drawing nigh to the most suffering of his creatures?[62]

Deepening trust and faith

In his writings he tries to engender in the reader deep trust, opening to them a faith filled with spiritual vision. The mystery of why, when faced with life's uncertainties, some have faith and trust and some do not is initially bound to their experiences of early development, that is, have those who cared for them been trustworthy to their needs? But life brings growth and growth brings change. The Gospel message that God loves humanity is at the heart of Faith. If we personally believe

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[62] George MacDonald. Weighed and Wanting (1882) opus cit., p.81.

this, then no matter what we are faced with -evil, suffering, sickness, death and every other uncertainty about human fulfillment- in our heart of hearts we are not shaken. If we doubt this, then all the above mentioned evils only serve to torment us about the uncertainties of life and of the goodness of God, something more important than the question of whether he exists at all.

The risk of faith

Every human being longs for fulfillment, especially interpersonal fulfillment -to love and be loved. But because of our vulnerability there are risks involved. To open ourselves up to others, to entrust ourselves to them carries with it the risks of rejection or victimization -hurt and misery. Some people never take the risk. Others take it, are hurt, and never try again. Others try, are hurt, but continue trying for they are driven by an inward need for happiness which outweighs any of the risks or hurts. Faith is very much like this. Some people will not risk belief for fear that in the end their faith was but wishful thinking. Better not to risk than to live one's life believing in a falsehood, for that would be the worst sort of mockery. However, these sorts of people end up never living at all, the transcendental part of their being, that which is essential to interpersonal relationships remains frozen. They wither away in the cocoon of their own fears. In the Princess and Curdie MacDonald says of a young man who was becoming a truster in only those things which he could see and feel and prove:

> He was gradually changing into a commonplace man. There is this difference between the growth of some human beings and that of others: in the one case it is a continual dying, in the other a continual resurrection. One of the latter sort comes at length to know at once whether a thing is true the moment it comes before him, one of the former class grows more and more afraid of being taken in, so afraid of it that he takes himself in altogether, and comes at length to believe in nothing but his dinner: to be sure of a thing with him is to have it between his teeth.[63]

"Resurrection" is a breaking through to greater or new life through a proper use of the old life, while "death" is simply a hoarding of life which withers away. Those who are living a "continual resurrection....at length" come to be able to recognise truth at once. They live with an openness which, even if it must be exercised through trial and error, has given them the apparatus for connatural discernment. The one whose life is a "continual dying" is so afraid "of being taken in...that he takes himself in altogether". That is, at length he frustrates the very process that will give truth and meaning at the core of his being.

Fear of being hurt or deceived (another type of hurt) curtails growth by closing down the individual's openness to the possibility of finding happiness. It does so by paralysing their emotions, that is, by intellectualising them and not allowing them to penetrate to the level of deeper transforming interaction, by preventing them from engaging their whole being. But by shutting down the emotions to possible hurt, they have also closed down the mechanism for normal personal interaction and so

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[63] George MacDonald. The Princess and Curdie (1882) (London: Octopus Books Ltd., 1979) ch. 2.

stagnate and find life empty, meaningless, and loveless. When faced with sorrow, joy or any other human emotion, all they have is a mental image which evokes a learned social reaction rather than a genuine spontaneous interaction -they live in their heads alone. Their hearts have become atrophied wastelands.[64]

In his novel Seaboard Parish (1868), MacDonald gives his own translation of Hebrews 11:1:"Now faith is the essence of hopes, the trying of things unseen."[65] and throughout the novel he reiterates the admonition of St. Paul "whatever is not of faith is sin", by which he seems to mean that unless we perceive God in all things (some aspect of his nature in all that surrounds us, good and evil alike) then we are separated from him, and hence "sin" or estrangement is our lot. We find that we are "not at home", not comfortable with life.

He exemplifies this in the character of Wynnie, the oldest daughter of the Walton family. Her father expresses his concern for Wynnie describing her uncomfortableness with life:

> Now, I had been uncomfortable about Wynnie for some time, and especially during our journey, and still more especially during the last part of our journey. There was something amiss with her. She seemed constantly more or less dejected, as if she had something to think about that was too much for her, although, to tell the truth, I really believe now that she had

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[64] cf. R. Johnson. The Existential Man opus cit., ch. 10.

[65] George MacDonald. The Seaboard Parish (1868) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co., no date) p. 624.

> not quite enough to think about.[66] ...the consequence is analogous to what follows when a healthy physical system is not supplied with sufficient food: the oxygen, the source of life, begins to consume the life itself; it tears up the timbers of the house to burn against the cold....This was, I say, the case in part with my Wynnie....She did not look quite happy, did not always meet a smile with a smile, looked almost reprovingly upon the frolics of the little brother-imps, and though kindness itself when any real hurt or grief befell them, had reverted to her old, somewhat dictatorial manner....To her mother and me she was service itself, only service without the smile which is as the flame of the sacrifice and makes it holy.[67]

When she awakes from a short innocent doze in her sister's room full of apologies, as if she had done something wrong, he embarks upon addressing this problem to her:

> "I beg your pardon, papa," looking almost guiltily round her, and putting up her hair hurriedly as if she had committed an impropriety in being caught untidy. This was fresh sign of a condition of mind that was not healthy.
>
> "My dear," I said, "what do you beg my pardon for? I was so pleased to see you asleep! and you look as if you thought I were going to scold you."
>
> "O papa," she said, laying her head on my shoulder...I so often feel now as if I were doing something wrong, or rather as if you would think I was doing something wrong. I am sure there must be something wicked in me somewhere, though I do not know clearly what it is. When I woke up now, I felt as if I had neglected something, and you had come to find fault with me. Is there anything papa?"
>
> "Nothing whatever, my child. But you cannot be well when you feel like that."

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[66] Victor Frankl similarly sometimes recommended more burdens to those who seemed already overburdened. He would say "if you want to strengthen an old archway you must add more weight to it". In this manner new resources finally burst forth freeing them from the quandary which they seemed incapable of escaping from.

[67] George MacDonald. The Seaboard Parish opus cit., pp. 146-148.

> "I am perfectly well, so far as I know. I was so cross with Dora today! Why shouldn't I feel happy when everybody else is? I must be wicked, papa."[68]

He decides to take her out for a walk along the sea coast so as to discuss her feelings with her. When they go outside they are faced with a glorious afternoon. The air is fresh and invigorating, the ground soft with scattered flowers, the sun shining as it hovered over the horizon, and their ears filled with the music of the waves. Mr. Walton is intoxicated in all his senses:

> Ear and eye, touch and smell, were all alike invaded with blessedness....The sense of space--of mighty room for life and growth filled my soul....The wind seemed to bear that growth into my soul, even as the wind of God first breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and the sun was the pledge of the fulfilment of every aspiration.[69]

When he asks Wynnie if she too is enjoying this testimony of grandeur, she replies that she cannot and, in fact, interprets this as testimony to her own wickedness. Walton, however, interprets this lack of appreciation as her, as of yet, not knowing or possessing God in her inmost being, and hence she hasn't the confident freedom of life to move around in, so to speak, which that Presence brings.

> "I suspect it is because you haven't room, Wynnie....I mean, my dear, that it is not because you are wicked, but because you do not know God well enough, and therefore your being, which can only live in him, is 'cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in.' It is only in him that the soul has room. In knowing him is life and gladness. The secret of your own heart you can never know; but you can know him who knows its secret....

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[68] Ibid. pp. 147-148.

[69] Ibid. p. 151.

> "To be at home with the awful source of your being, through the child-like faith which he not only permits, but requires, and is ever teaching you, or rather seeking to rouse up in you, is the only cure for such feelings as those that trouble you. Do not say it is too high for you. God made you in his image, therefore capable of understanding him. For this final end he sent his Son, that the Father might with him come into you, and dwell with you. Till he does so, the temple of your soul is vacant; there is no light behind the veil, no cloudy pillar over it; and the priests, your thoughts, feelings, loves, and desires, moan and are troubled--for where is the work of the priest when the god is not there? When He comes to you, no mystery, no unknown feeling will any longer distress you.[70]

And this, not because she will now fully understand, but rather, because of trust in, and entrustment to, the knower:

> "You will say, 'He knows, though I do not.' And you will be at the secret of the things he has made. You will feel what they are, and that which his will created in gladness you will receive in joy. One glimmer of the present God in this glory would send you home singing....Tell him to look at your sorrow, ask him to come and set it right, making the joy go up in your heart by his presence. I do not know when this may be....Trust, my daughter, and let that give you courage and strength."[71]

Wynnie takes courage from these admonitions and directions but seems to continue on her own path of uncertainty and meets and marries a man of similar uncertainties. In a later conversation between Walton and Wynnie's sister, her sister conjectures that Wynnie's problem is "because she can't wait. She always goes out to meet things; and then when they're not there waiting for her, she thinks they're nowhere."[72] That is, she thinks she has been

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[70] Ibid. pp.151-152.

[71] Ibid. pp. 152-153.

[72] Ibid. p. 195.

let down or taken in.

Neither judges her but they recognize her temperament as that of a person who must do a lot of thinking to be healthy. For all the human race, but especially for such "thinkers", the anchor of trustful faith needs to be grounded in God dwelling within, which is the only harbour of peace for the intellect until the morning star rises and faith gradually gives way to vision. Those of such temperament seem to embody in themselves what most people only experience in crisis. And so, they exemplify the need for the doing of what is at least partially perceived as right, as a necessary means of attaining the vision of God while awaiting this revelation. They need more to do for peace.

Second-guessing God: "the blacksmith"

In this same novel MacDonald treats one other aspect of the suffering which a lack of faith brings. It is the lack of trust in God's care such that we take upon ourselves to arrange things in a more stable way than He is willing to give, and in so doing stifle or petrify the higher forms of human growth. In this novel, MacDonald relates it directly to a false notion of God which his character, Joe, acquired in childhood from a harsh minister. Joe is a young blacksmith who suffers from tuberculosis. He is in love with a young woman, who is also in love with him, but he refuses to marry her for fear of leaving her a widow. Walton admonishes him:

> But marriage is God's will and death is God's will, and you have no business to set the one over against, as antagonistic to, the other. For anything you know,

> the gladness and peace of marriage may be the very means intended for your restoration to health and strength.[73]

When Joe pleads that he is only thinking of Aggy, he is asked why he dares to force her to live by the security of worldly wisdom when, given her own choice, she would reject it. They leave off their conversation because the rocks where they are standing begin to be threatened by the waves. The sea has become wild and they must literally run for their lives across the breakwater. All three are nearly swept away.

> "We were awfully near death," said Joe.
>
> "Nearer than you thought, Joe; and yet we escaped it. Things don't go all as we fancy, you see. Faith is as essential to manhood as foresight."[74]

In this way, MacDonald drives home his point to both the blacksmith and the reader of how foolish it is to try to control things which we really have no control over.

For MacDonald, then, "faith" actually gives the person the freedom he needs to act. This both does justice to the idea of an omnipotent God -all good, all knowing, all powerful, all loving, all embracing; and the needs of fragile human nature, which, precisely in such an ambience of such a God, is provided with the necessary framework for growth. In such an exposition of "Faith", MacDonald wonderfully reveals the complementarity of human need and divine omnipotence and sheds light on this often

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[73] Ibid. p. 398.

[74] Ibid. P. 403.

paradoxical relationship wherein God's omnipotence, rather than inhibiting free human growth, actually provides the safe framework for its flourishing. A faith-filled atmosphere provides the creature with the necessary security to be ever obedient to what he or she perceives as right and overcomes the fears that opposed that action. The exercise of faith in opposition to fear both deepens trust and transforms the doer, making them more God-like, which likeness broadens and deepens the basis for understanding. Obedience, then, is the exercise of faith over fear and reinforces, in an experiential way, that trust which is essential to and for the freedom to grow. This final element, obedience or faith (the other two being suffering and failure), sheds light on MacDonald's anthropology of human moral growth and learning which transforms and opens the individual to both God and neighbour and does so in a connatural way.

Man as Learner: Critics and Advocates

The critics of Man as "the learner" are those, who when faced with the reality of so many people who will not perhaps begin to learn to act rightly in this life, reject the possibility of their learning after death. They seek judgment and the end of the process of becoming. Perhaps they are motivated by hurt and a need for justice, or, by a literal interpretation of some texts of the Bible, but without the interpreting or extrapolating faculty which the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ provides. They, therefore, mistrust human nature itself, seeing sin

as rooted in the very essence of Man. With such premises, they reject the idea of the human being as a "learner"; mistrusting human reason and the freedom of choice which that reason allows. Therefore, for them, this vehicle of salvation (the learning and so choosing freely what is right) is seen as faulty for the whole race and therefore they start relying on some "Mysterious Will" as the reason of things and the decider of salvation. But, in so doing, they rupture the unity between faith and reason, grace and free will -Man acting according to a human mode. They make salvation dependent upon a Mystery who chooses some people and rejects others, binding God to their petty framework of time. And to secure His "justice" within their limits, they vitiate Man's very notions of a God of Love.

In his novel Robert Falconer (1868), MacDonald exposes this sort of short-sighted "religion" with its cruelty and its inconsistencies with regard to the human heart's understanding of love. In a conversation between the protagonist, Robert, a boy of about fourteen, and his rather stern Calvinist grandmother with whom he lives, Robert sets forth his own "plan of salvation", motivated by the love which he holds for his wayward father. Both he and his grannie have a strong personal interest in these theories since his father (her son) has deserted the family long ago for a drunken life, and they both worry for him.

One Sunday evening, while reading the Old Testament, after dinner, a conversation about Joseph being a type of Christ, in that he suffered at the hands of his brothers only to be their

saviour in the future, comes up. He asks his grandmother if others, besides Christ, can suffer for the sins of their neighbours. She answers, "Ay, laddie, mony a ane has to do that."[75] To which, she quickly adds "But no to make atonement, ye ken. Naething but the sufferin' o' the spotless cud du that . The Lord wadna be satisfeet wi' less nor that. It maun be the innocent to suffer for the guilty."[76] Having established the premise that everyone is guilty and only by the grace of the innocent Christ is anyone saved, their conversation moved onto the homely image of the saved being "dressed i' the weddin' garment, and set doon at the table wi' him and wi' his Father. That's them 'at believes in him, ye ken."[77] With this image as the stage, the boy now launches into his own heartfelt "plan", which he hopes will be a consolation to her about her son.

> "Weel, ye see, I hae been thinkin' o' a plan for maist han' toomin' (almost emptying) hell....
> "A' them 'at sits doon to the supper o' the Lamb 'll sit there because Christ suffert the punishment due to their sins -- winna they, grannie?"
>
> "Doobtless, laddie."
>
> "But it'll be some sair upo' them to sit there aitin' an' drinkin' an' talkin' awa', an' enjoyin' themsel's, whan ilka noo an' than there'll come a sough o' wailin' up frae the ill place, an' a smell o' burnin' ill to bide."
>
> "What put that i' yer heid, laddie? There's no rizzon to think 'at hell's sae near haven as a' that. The Lord forbid it!"
>
> "Weel, but, grannie, they'll ken 't a' the same, whether they smell 't or no. An' I canna help thinkin'

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[75] George MacDonald. Robert Falconer (1868) opus cit., ch. 12 (p.80).

[76] Ibid. pp. 80-81.

[77] Ibid.

that the farrer awa' I thoucht they war, the waur I wad like to think upo' them. 'Deed it wad be waur."

"What are ye drivin' at, laddie? I canna unnerstan' ye," said Mrs. Falconer, feeling very uncomfortable, and yet curious, almost anxious, to hear what would come next. "I trust we winna hae to think muckle___"

But here, I presume, the thought of the added desolation of her Andrew if she, too, were to forget him, as well as his Father in heaven, checked the flow of her words. She paused, and Robert took up his parable and went on, first with yet another question.

"Duv you think, grannie, that a body wad be allooed to speik a word i' public, like, there--at the lang table, like, I mean?

What for no, gin it was dune wi' moedesty, and for a guid rizzon? But railly, laddie, I dooby ye're haverin' a'thegither. Ye hard naething like that, I'm sure, the day, frae Mr. MacCleary [their Minister]."

"Na, na; he said naething aboot it. But maybe I'll gang and speir at him, though."

"What aboot?"

"What I'm gaein' to tell ye, grannie."

"Weel, tell awa', and hae dune wi' 't. I'm growin' tired o' 't."

It was something else but tired she was growing.

"Weel, I'm gaein' to try a' that I can to win in there."

"I houp ye will. Strive and pray. Resist the deevil. Walk in the licht. Lippen not to yersel', but trust in Christ and his salvation."

"Ay, ay, grannie, --Weel--"

"Are ye no dune yet?"

"Na. I'm but jist beginnin'."

"Beginnin', are ye? Humph!"

"Weel, gin I win in there, the verra first nicht I sit doon wi' the lave o' them, I'm gaein' to rise up an' say -- that is, gin the Maister, at the heid o' the table, disna bid me sit doon--an' say: 'Brithers an' sisters, the haill o' ye, hearken to me for ae minute; an', O Lord! gin I say wrang, jist tak the speech frae

> me, and I'll sit doon dumb an' rebukit. We're a' here by grace and no by merit, save his, as ye a' ken better nor I can tell ye, for ye hae been langer here nor me. But it's jist ruggin' an' rivin' at my hert to think o' them 'at's doon there. Maybe ye can hear them. I canna. Noo, we hae nae merit, an' they hae nae merit, an' what for are we here and them there? But were washed clean and innocent noo; and noo, whan there's no wyte lying upo' oursel's, it seems to me that we micht beir some o' the sins o' them 'at hae ower mony. I call upo' ilk ane o' ye 'at has a frien' or a neebor down yonner, to rise up an' taste nor bite nor sup mair till we gang up a'thigither to the fut o' the throne, and pray the Lord to lat's gang and du as the Maister did afore's, and beir their griefs, and cairry their sorrows doon in hell there; gin it maybe that they may repent and get remission o' their sins, an' come up here wi' us at the lang last, and sit doon wi' 's at this table, a'throuw the merits o' oor Saviour Jesus Christ, at the heid o' the table there. Amen.'"[78]

At the end of this discourse, the poor boy is so overcome by emotion that he bursts into tears and goes to his bedroom. MacDonald tells us that his grannie, that same evening tells him not to be judging God and his ways, but that from that day she was visibly more tender toward him. She tells him to keep praying for his father, for she was sure that he was still alive and therefore there was still hope. The reader is left with some of the turmoil and unrest that the characters are experiencing and longs for a kinder theology and a less mysterious God to love. MacDonald's own view follows in the train of a long tradition of Christian thinkers who value human reason and its access to the God of Love.

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[78] Ibid. pp. 81-83.

MAN THE LEARNER: PLATONIC INFLUENCES

MacDonald's understanding of salvation and union with God and neighbour through moral growth is supported by various strands of Platonic and Neo-Platonic Christian theology. It came to MacDonald by way of such men as Thomas Erskine[79], A.J. Scott, F.D. Maurice (all three good friends), Coleridge, William Law (1686-1741)[80], as well as his own reading of Henry More, and perhaps some others of the Cambridge Platonists (of whom Law, Coleridge, and Erskine were familiar), and his own reading of Plato, which he adopts and which highlights his most basic ideas or presuppositions about God and the nature of Man and of their relationship. The chief resemblance to his own theology is the 17th century school of the Cambridge Platonists. Their theology grew out of strikingly similar patterns of influence which MacDonald was faced with two centuries later and so we present their thought in order to better understand and situate his own.

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[79] Erskine was especially grateful to Plato for his notion of suffering being a good thing for the corrective of the sinner. In a letter to A.J. Scott dated Apr. 21, 1837 he writes:

> I have been reading Plato with immense interest and astonishment. In Georgias I find the doctrine of atonement in its principle applied to the conscience, better than in any religious book I ever read. I mean the principle of "accepting punishment", which is the fond of the doctrine.(Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology, vol. 3, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen by Nicholas R. Needham, Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990) p.404.

[80] William Law knew the writings of Tauler, Ruysbroeck, Basil the Great, Hilary of Poitiers, and others. He was significantly influenced by the writings of Nicholas Malabranche (1638-1715), who taught that the soul, by virtue of being united to God, had the Word spiritually present to it. And in his book The Spirit of Love taught that there must be a "Seed of Christ" or a spark of heaven already in human nature otherwise Christ's mediatorial offices of redemption could not be made.
Law had a great influence on the thought of Thomas Erskine.

In their particular historical circumstances they posited an independent and conciliatory theology amidst the wranglings between Puritans and Laudians. They stressed Christian living over doctrine and practices, the true Christian being a person who lived from the Spirit of Christ within, enlightening his/her conscience[81]; and although they were little heeded in their time, they present a picture of Christianity which has a timelessness about it. On the human side, there is a respect for their neighbour's freedom of conscience which is rooted not simply in "toleration" as a means of maintaining social order and hence one's own freedom[82], but rather in their genuine respect for the

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[81] In a Sermon Preached before the House of Commons, March 31, 1647 by Ralph Cudworth, he puts forth this doctrine:

> Christ was "Vitae Magister", not "Scholae": and he is the best Christian, whose heart beats with the truest pulse toward heaven; not he whose head spinneth out the finest cobwebs. He that endeavours to really mortifie his lusts, and to comply with that truth in his life, which his Conscience is convinced of; is neerer a Christian, though he never heard of Christ; than he that believes all the vulgar Articles [in the sense of commonly proposed] of the Christian faith, and plainly denyeth Christ in his life. Reprinted in The Cambridge Platonists edited by C. A. Patrides, London: Edward Arnold Press, 1969, p 96.)

[82] Locke, (who was a Whig) uses this type of argument in his work on toleration ("Epistola de tolerantia", 1689), after showing the interdependence of different liberties he appeals to Englishmen on the grounds that in placing restrictions on others they may find that they have paved the way for others to restrict their liberties, and hence to beware. The Cambridge Platonists, on the other hand, believed in the absolute supremacy of personal conscience over doctrine and practices, and over moral rules and regulations, and hence their toleration is rooted in respect for the individuals exercise of this God-given faculty. They did, however, qualify this absolute respect of others freedom with regard to two groups: (1) they felt that "enthusiasts" [what we would define as religious fanatics] did not live by reason and hence should not be given their complete freedom, since they would impose restrictions and conformity

respect for the individual's freedom of conscience.

The Cambridge Platonists

The Cambridge Platonists were a small group of theologians from Cambridge University. Their leader and acknowledged head was Benjamin Whichcote (1609-83), who was considered such because it was he who first publicly expounded their teachings. He was also the eldest of the group as well as the tutor at Emmanuel College of one of the other members of the group, John Smith (1616-52). The other members were Ralph Cudworth (1617-88) and Henry More (1614-87)[83]. All were friends, all were Anglican clergymen, and all, except More (Christ's College), were from Emmanuel College -the Puritan-Calvinist stronghold.

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which would violate the personal conscience of others. (2) There was one other group to which liberty of conscience was not afforded (which to our contemporary ear may sound strange), and that was to atheists. They reasoned as follows:

> For he that believes there is no God, nor reward nor punishment after this life, what pretence can he have of claiming a right to liberty of conscience? For atheism...is palpably false in itself to any man that has a clear exercise of reason...(Henry More, The Mystery of Godliness, ch. 10. reprinted in The Cambridge Platonists, ed. by Gerald Cragg, New York: The Oxford Univ. Press, 1968, p. 313.

(It should be noted that in none of John Smith's writings are such exclusions found.)

[83] Some authors admit, with qualification, other theologians such as Nathanael Culverwell, Peter Sterry, Joseph Glanville (Oxford), George Rust, Edward Stillingfleet, Richard Cumberland, and some others; however, we will limit ourselves to the writings of the core group as they are the most representative of the ideas we would like to compare with MacDonald's own.

These men lived in a time of social, political, religious, and scientific upheaval. Man's free will was assailed on two fronts. Science proposed a mechanistic theory of the universe which distanced God from his creation as simply a "first mover" and left his Providence as a predetermined function of first motions whose laws were unchangeable rather than a moment to moment care.[84] Meanwhile, theological doctrines of "voluntarism", which preserved God's freedom at the expense of a rationally discernible morality were proposed[85], as well as the Calvinistic doctrine

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[84] For example, Kepler wrote "My aim is ...to show that the celestial machine is to be likened not to a kind of divine living being but rather to a clockwork..." (Kepler to Herwart von Hohenburg, 10 February 1605. Quoted from The New Cambridge Modern History, ed. by J.P. Cooper, Cambridge: at the University Press, 1970; vol. 4, p. 145).

[85] Ralph Cudworth took these topics up at length, arguing especially against the philosophy of Hobbes, in his books The True Intellectual System of the Universe and A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutablle Morality (3 volumes, London: Thomas Tegg, 1845). In this second book he looks at three positions of fatality all of which rob the human being of either God or the personal care of God, and of human freedom: (1) natural or material fatalism which excludes God "supposing senseless matter, necessarily moved to be the principal cause of all things". He sees the origin of this error in the philosophy of Epicurus and the atheists. (2) what he calls "theologic or divine fate....-which indeed allows in words the existence of the perfect Intellectual Being, distinct from matter, whom we call God: yet affirming that God irrespectively decrees and determines all things, evil as well as good, doth in effect make all actions alike necessary to us.

> In consequence whereof, God's will is not regulated by his essential and immutable goodness and justice: God is a mere arbitrary will omnipotent: and in respect to us, moral good and evil are positive things, and not so in their own nature, that is, things are good or bad because they are commanded or forbidden...

(3) what he calls "Stoical Fate", having to do with a chain of contingent events, "all in themselves necessary, from the first principal of Being, who pre-ordained every event...so as to leave no room to liberty or contigency anywhere in the world" (vol. 3, pp. 519-531).

of predestination. These doctrines, besides jeopardizing Man's freedom, undermined his very perception of God as caring, good, loving and trustworthy, thus destroying Man's confidence in God, without which confidence, a deep relationship is impossible from the human side. Secondly, Calvinistic teaching on the condition of Man after the Fall further called into question man's ability to perceive God from the light of natural reason and thus widened the gap between faith and reason. For example, when speaking of Plato and the Greeks, while he allows them the ability to perceive that there is a God and Man's happiness lies in union with Him[86], Calvin cruelly denies them the ability to realise that destiny explaining away their perception of eternal truths through reason by saying they were mere glimpses which did not allow their actually being able to direct their lives to it or obtain personal growth through it:

> They [the Greek philosophers] so sawe the things they sawe, that by such seeing they were not directed to the truth, much lesse did attaine unto it, like as a wayfaring man in the midest of the field, for a sudden moment, seeth farre and wide the glistering of lightning in the night time, but with such a quickly vanishing sight, that he is sooner covered againe with the darknesse of the night, than he can stirre his foot, so farre is it off that he can be brought into his way by such helpe. Besides that, those small drops of trueth, wherewith as it were by chaunce, they sprinkle their bookes, with how many and how monstrous lies are they defiled? Finally, they never so much as smelled that assurednesse of Gods good will toward us, without which, mans wit must needs be filled with infinite confusion. Therefore mans reason neither approacheth, nor goeth toward, nor once directeth sight unto this truth, to understand who is the true

[86] Cf. Calvin. The Institution of Christian Religion, II. ii, 18.

God, or what he will be toward us.[87]

Religious upheavals also served to multiply the number of Christian sects at this time, all claiming to have the true doctrine of Christianity while simultaneously violating Christianity's very core of charity by denouncing and persecuting those outside their beliefs and practices.

It was among this strife that the Cambridge Platonists developed their theology and it was from a similar atmosphere of scientific determinism and a Federalistic Calvinism from which MacDonald developed his own theology -coming up with similar solutions but articulating them with his inimical Christian imagination placing his own stamp upon them. Our interest will be focused on the presuppositions from which both build their theology and from which they draw their conclusions, specifically, those elements in the nature of man and the nature of God which complement one another toward a relationship of loving communion. The Christian anthropology which both propose seeks to do justice to God as both loving creator and saviour; and to man as a freely acting creature in spite of sin, whose freedom is respected by God as part of the very way in which He made

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[87] Calvin. The Institution of Christian Religion, I, v, 10; I, xv, 6; I, ii, 3) quoted from de Pauley, The Candle of the Lord, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York: MacMillan Company, 1937, p. 235.
When speaking of the light of God attained by the philosophers, Calvin gives most credit to Plato "the most religious and most sober", since he teaches that the soul is immortal, its "soveraigne good...is the likeness of God....and his conjoyning with him". (III.xxv, 2)
Ibid.

Man.

Platonism and Christianity

Historically, the acceptance of various Platonic and Neo-Platonic ideas, has, from the early centuries of the Church's existence helped Christian theologians to understand and explain revelation, and, with some adjustments, to do so without compromising their faith. Such ideas as the immortality of the soul, God as the true and highest good, the unity of God, the virtuous life as a way to union with God, the forms of things as existing in the mind of God, all are evidenced in Platonic philosophy.

In the 2nd century, for example, seeking to defend Christians from persecution, the apologists Aristides (who had studied in Athens) wrote to the Roman emperor Hadrian (117-138), and Justin Martyr to Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (reigning from 161-180) and Lucius Verus (161-169), seeking to show that Christianity was reconcilable to Platonic Philosophy and hence not an enemy to Roman life[88]. In the 3rd century, in Alexandria, Clement (c. 150-c.215) used Plato's philosophy as a tool for teaching religion while his pupil Origen used it for Scriptural exegesis. In the 4th century, the writings of the Cappadocians were influenced by Plotinus. Gregory of Nyssa echoes Plotinus' teaching on the direct union of the mind with God producing "a divine and

[88] For example, in chapter 59 of his first apology he suggest that Plato was using Moses as a source when describing creation.

sober inebriation"[89]

So it was along these lines that the Cambridge Platonists adopted and developed their theology. Whichcote referred to Plato and Plotinus as "those eagle eyed philosophers" and More called them "the best and divinest of philosphers".[90] All four of the Cambridge Platonists refer to Plato, and even more frequently, to Plotinus. They also borrow from the Eastern Fathers, and only accept Augustine when he is in agreement with them.

Human nature

The Cambridge Platonists looked upon evil as a defect in the good. They followed Plotinus, the Greek Fathers and Augustine in seeing evil as a sort of non-entity, a non-true existence.[91] They accepted Original Sin, but qualified it, as with all sin, as being contrary to the ontology of human nature, which, as nature, would have its way. Whichcote puts it thus:

> There is a natural propension in everything to return to its true state, if by violence it has been disturbed. Should it not be so in grace, in the divine life? Virtue is the health, true state, natural complexion of the soul. He that is vicious in practice is diseased in his mind.[92]

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[89] Gregory of Nyssa. "Beatitudes", 6; "In Canticum Canticorum", 10.

[90] Whichcote. Discourses, II, 400; More, Preface to Philosophical Poems, (quoted from The Cambridge Platonists, edited by Patrides, London: Edward Arnold Pub. Ltd., 1969, p. 4.)

[91] Cf. Augustine, Confessions, Book 7, chapters 18-22; Athanasius, On the Incarnation, IV; Origen, Commentaria in Evangelium Joannis, II, 7; Plotinus, Enneads, I, viii.

[92] Benjamin Whichcote. "Moral and Religious Aphorisms", n. 24. (printed in The Cambridge Platonists, edited by G. Cragg, New (continued...)

> Man as "Man", is Averse to what is Evil and Wicked; for "Evil" is unnatural, and "Good" is connatural, to Man.[93]

Hence, he (and the others to varying degrees) held a very positive view of human nature and saw it as an ally of the individual, urging him to perfection. This very much echoes the teaching of Maximus the Confessor who had a confidence that Man would, in the end, always will for God since Man's will was created by God.[94] This understanding of human nature looks to a natural growth back to God. The mechanism of this growth is free choice of the truth -something not at first so easy to perceive.

Human reason

MacDonald, in The Hope of the Gospel says that "Everything in the world is more or less misunderstood at first: we have to learn what it is, and come at length to see that it must be so, that it could not be otherwise; and we never know a thing really until we know it thus."[95] Such an understanding of things would

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[92](...continued)
York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968, p. 411.)

In an undated letter to his future wife, George MacDonald expresses similar ideas about Man's true or natural state as being one of virtue:

> The religion of Jesus Christ is intended to bring us back to our real natural condition: for all the world is in an unnatural state. (George MacDonald and His Wife, opus cit., p. 119).

[93] Benjamin Whichcote, "Moral and Religious Aphorisms" n. 42. quoted from C.A. Patrides, opus cit., p. 326.

[94] cf. Pelikan, Vol. 2, pp.12-13.

[95] George MacDonald. The Hope of the Gospel, opus cit., p.9.

carry with it a certitude which we could not help assenting to. For him, the way to this knowledge is through the experience of living. This led to an "understanding of the heart" rather than simply an intellectual understanding, and the heart was assisted in its search by the imagination. For example in his novel Weighed and Wanting, he criticises the character of Gerald Raymount because "He was so busy understanding with his intellect, that he missed the better understanding of heart and imagination. He was always so pleased with the thought of a thing, that he missed the thing itself -whose possession, and not its thought, is essential."[96] The knowledge of the heart gives actual communion with its object through the uniting quality of love. MacDonald felt that once a person began to understand what was right, s/he must do it, must be obedient, or else there would be no peace and a sense of betrayal of the "true self" and its concomitant guilt and self-loathing would ensue. But this failure and its misery, would be a source of greater understanding. Likewise, the doing of what one knows is right produces in the person greater understanding and happiness.

The Cambridge Platonists taught this way to perfection. For them it was through "reason", which they understood as the faculty in Man given by God to be a guiding light back to Him, that the human being came to freely willing its own perfection. "Reason", was, for them, a rather comprehensive term, one which embraces

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[96] George MacDonald. Weighed and Wanting (1882) opus cit., p.320

the whole person.[97] It was not simply a gift of God for quantitative analysis of one's environment, but was, most importantly, open to God's own "Reason" for enlightenment. It both determined and initiated moral action as well as being dependent upon that action for continued and greater openness to God and his inspiration, based on the Platonic notion of knowledge and union through likeness; and, in addition to moral goodness bringing about likeness to God, from good moral acts flow happiness and from sin sadness in regard to the persons quality or state of being.[98] There is also a mystical element[99] of experiential union with God through contemplation flowing from the living of the Christian life which is an integral part of their theology. For MacDonald too, mysticism permeated every aspect of life, if only

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[97] Coleridge, who was influenced by the writings of these men defines reason similarly, as opposed to the restrictive definition he gives to "understanding". He even imitated Whichcote in writing moral aphorisms. MacDonald, in turn, was much influenced by Coleridge.

[98] e.g., Plato, in his Republic says that a ruler's happiness, despite his authority to have and do what he likes, is dependent upon moral goodness:

> I must judge them... by the criterion of virtue and vice, happiness and misery....the best and justest is also the happiest, and that this is he who is the most royal man and king over himself. (Book 9, 580ff, Jowett)

[99] The element of mysticism in a Christian life guided by reason was something which was often missing in other theologians of their school and one which did not survive to the next generation. Gerald Cragg writes:

> In Smith and Whichcote there is a depth which is missing in [Simon] Patrick and Stillingfleet. You can transmit a certain kind of rationalism, but mysticism is a subtler and more elusive matter. Something of incalculable value had faded into the light of common day. (From Puritanism to the Age of Reason - A Study of Changes in Religious Thought within the Church of England 1660-1700, Cambridge: at the University Press, 1966, pp. 63-64.)

we had the sense of wonder to see the marvelous in the mundane. But for him, this especially manifested itself in the Romantic appreciation of Nature as expressed by such poets as Wordsworth. Even what is often percieved as solitude or aloneness was for MacDonald the all pervasive "Presence" of God. For example, in the novel Wilfred Cumbermede (1872), Wilfred remarks, "Many is the winter since my boyhood which I have spent amongst the Alps; and in such solitude I have found the negation of all solitude, the one absolute Presence.[100] And in the novel What's Mine's Mine (1886), the character Ian relates how while hunting wolves in Russia he spent the whole night in a tree. At one point he felt utterly alone amidst the infinite sky surrounding him:

> the limitless space came down, and clasped me, and held me. It came close to me -as if I had been a shape of which all nature was taking a mould. I was at once everything and nothing. I cannot tell you how frightful it was! In agony I cried to God, with a cry of utter despair....a great quiet fell upon me - but a quiet as of utter defeat and helplessness. Then again, I cannot tell how, the quiet and helplessness melted away into a sense of God -a feeling as if great space all about me was God and not emptiness. [neither] Wolf nor sin could touch me! I was a wide peace--my very being peace! And in my mind--whether an echo from the Bible, I do not know--were the words:--"I, even I, am he that comforteth thee. I am God, thy saviour!" Whereas I had seemed all alone, I was with God...[101]

Some of Whichcote's aphorisms clarify the above points about "reason". First with respect to God's illuminating human reason:

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[100] George MacDonald. Wilfred Cumbermead. opus cit., Vol. 3, p.279.

[101] George MacDonald. What's Mine's Mine (1886) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1911) p. 105.

n. 916. "The Spirit of a Man is the Candle of the Lord"-[Prov. 20:27]; Lighted by God, and Lightning us to God. Res illuminata, illuminans.[102]

n. 99. Reason discovers what is Natural; and Reason receives, what is Supernatural.[103]

n. 33. The Rule of Right is Reason, the Reason of Things; the Judgment of Right is, the Reason of our Minds perceiving the reason of Things.[104]

n. 76. To go against Reason, is to go against God: it is the self-same thing, to do that which the Reason of the Case doth require; and that which God Himself doth appoint: Reason is the Divine Governor of Man's Life; it is the very Voice of God.[105]

With regard to the link between the moral life, the likeness to God it produces, its necessity for union with God and happiness:

n. 248. We worship God best when we resemble him most.[106]

n. 969. Nothing is more spiritual than that which is moral.[107]

n. 743. Morality is not a means to anything but to happiness; everything else is a means to morality.[108]

n. 925. He knows most, who Does best.[109]

n. 241 Virtue has reward, Vice has Punishment, arising out

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[102] Ibid. p. 334.

[103] Ibid. p. 327.

[104] Ibid. p.326.

[105] Ibid. p.327.

[106] Benjamin Whichcote. "Moral and Religious Aphorisms", Cragg opus cit., p. 425.

[107] Ibid., p. 432.

[108] Ibid. p. 431.

[109] Benjamin Whichcote, "Moral and Religious Aphorisms", printed in The Cambridge Platonists, edited by Patrides, opus cit., p. 334.

of itself.[110]

Consistent with the doctrine of moral transformation bringing union with God and its accompanying happiness, they taught that the joy of heaven and and the misery of hell are begun here and now according to one's degree of virtue or vice:

> n. 100. Both Heaven and Hell have their Foundation within Us. Heaven primarily lies in a refined Temper[111], in an internal Reconciliation to the Nature of God, and to the Rule of Righteousness. The Guilt of Conscience, and Enmity to Righteousness, is the inward state of Hell...[112]

John Smith uses the metaphor of marriage to symbolize the closeness of union of the soul with God[113] -heaven- here and now:

> A good Christian does not only court his Happiness, and cast now and then a smile upon it, or satisfy himself merely to be contracted to it; but with greatest ardours of Love and Desire he pursues the solemnity of the just Nuptialls, that he may be wedded to it and made one with it. It is not an aiery speculation of Heaven as a thing (though never so undoubtedly) to come, that can satisfy his hungry desires, but the reall possession of it even in this life.[114]

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[110] Ibid. p. 329.

[111] the word "temper" used here by Whichcote signifies a state or attitude of mind and constitution. cf. Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., 20 vol., (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1989) Vol. 17, definitions II, 8-10, p. 745. For example, the relational harmony of the strings of a musical instrument as in Bach's works for the "Well-tempered Clavichord".

[112] Benjamin Whichcote. "Moral and Religious Aphorisms", Patrides, opus cit., p. 327.

[113] Although the image of the Church being the "bride of Christ" is Pauline, it has been applied to the relationship of the individual Christian's soul since Tertullian with respect to ascetic virgins; and by Origen, with repect to the Christian soul, in his interpretation of the Canticle of Canticles.

[114] John Smith. The Excellency and Nobleness of True Religion, printed in Patrides, The Cambridge Platonists, opus cit., p 192.

With regard to the mystical element in their teachings: it is an experience of God imparted to "reason", which communicates a loving knowledge. This knowledge is expressed in a penetrating understanding of the Christian life and verified by the living of a Christ-like life. Their teaching can be summed up in these excerpts from John Smith:

> When Reason once is raised by the mighty force of the Divine Spirit into a converse with God, it is turn'd into Sense: that which before was onely Faith well built upon sure Principles...now becomes Vision. (p. 140)
>
> To seek our Divinity meerly in Books and Writings, is "to seek the living among the dead": we do but in vain seek God many times in these, where his Truth too often is not so much enshrin'd as entomb'd: no; intra te quaere Deum, seek for God within thine own soul; he is best discern'd noera epafe, as Plotinus phraseth it, by "an Intellectual touch" of him (Enneads I,ii-,6): we must see with our eyes, and hear with our ears, and our hands must handle the word of life, that I may express it in St. John's words (I Jn. 1:1)(p.12-9).
>
> There is a knowing of the truth as it is in Jesus, as it is in a Christ-like nature, as it is in that sweet, mild, humble, and loving Spirit of Jesus, which spreads itself like a Morning-Sun upon the souls of good men, full of light and life....There is an inward beauty, life and loveliness in Divine Truth, which cannot be known but onely then when it is digested into life and practice.(p.134)[115]

Reason, then, for the Cambridge Platonists, is the guiding principle of the Christian life, one with moral living as its defining characteristic --"Morality is not a means to anything but to happiness; everything else is a means to morality" (n.

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[115] Johm Smith. The True Way of Attaining to Divine Knowledge, From Select Discourses, ed. by John Worthington (1660), Disc. I, reprinted by Patrides in The Cambridge Platonists, opus cit..

743 above) --and which brings us into experiential relation to God. It is one of the defining characteristic of the human:

> n.71. There is nothing proper and peculiar to man but the use of reason and the exercise of virtue.[116]

The thing to especially note here is the unity or unifying effects of the relationships between moral living and knowledge of God and of happiness, as well as the power of "reason" over moral choices, such that, once perceived properly there is no real choice to a situation since its very reality "is", and can be no other way. There is an inexorability about it fixed in the unchangeable God who is the source of all reality.

Obstacles to Learning - Obstacles to Change

Obstacles to The Reason of Things

If "reason" carries with it an infallible response, then why does it not reign in so many lives? How are we to understand this inability of people to come to a proper understanding of their relationship to God and their neighbour? In the last chapter we spoke of mechanisms of defense, which interfere with our perceptions in order to maintain our self-image. Likewise we mentioned briefly the problem of pride as blinding Cornelius to the needs of the old man in Weighed and Wanting. There, we said that pride seemed to work similarly to a mechanism of defense. We would like to explore this further along classical lines of theology in regard to not only pride, but also some of the other

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[116] Whichcote. "Aphorisms", Cragg, opus cit., p. 464.

"seven deadly sins", especially "sloth", with the hope of shedding light on this perplexing problem.

"If today you here his voice, harden not your hearts"

God's call to the human being to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect", calls for a cooperation which requires a person to go beyond his or her present condition. It requires a self-transcendence, a step into the unknown so to learn. It requires a willingness to risk personal loss in order to attain the happiness which the human heart longs for. But openness, at least for a finite creature, implies vulnerability. The unwillingness on the part of the creature to undergo this state of vulnerability is at the root of the aberrations of human behaviour which isolate Man from moral growth and hence friendship with God and neighbour.

Pride

St. Thomas Aquinas, whose synthesis of philosophical thought on the virtues and vices remains unparalleled, defines "pride" as "an appetite for excellence in excess of right reason".[117] He follows St. Gregory the Great in listing the various species of pride:

> Gregory...says (Moral. xxiii, 6) "There are four marks by which every kind of pride of the arrogant betrays itself; either [1] when they think that their good is from themselves, or [2] if they believe it to be from above, yet they think it is due to their own merits;

[117] St. Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologica, opus cit., II-II q. 162, a. 1, ad 2.

> or [3] when they boast of having what they have not; or [4] despise others and wish to appear the exclusive possessor of what they have.[118]

The inordinate desire for excellence which the proud person displays tends to make him or her seek their joy in receiving "praise and reverence" from others, as that is their proper object,[119] rather than in the goods themselves or the love with which they might have been given. Hence, such persons remain caught up in this need and isolate themselves. In fact, the good which he or she posseses, rather than becoming a basis for loving friendship with God or neighbour, becomes an obstacle. St. Augustine sums up the matter like this:

> it may be that a man is praised for some gift which you have given him and takes more pleasure in hearing himself praised than in having that gift for which he is praised; this man too is praised by men, but blamed by you, and those who praise him are better than he who is praised; for what gives them pleasure is the gift of God in a man, but he takes more pleasure in what men give than in what God has given.[120]

The first species of pride "when they think that their good is from themselves" is especially interesting from the perspective of a gift which is so gratuitously given that the receiver actually is ignorant of the fact it is not really his/hers as from origin. This type of gift would have to do with the essence and being of the creature, i.e., pre-cognitive givens. The revelation of one's being and nature as sheer gift carries with

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[118] Ibid. II-II q. 162, a. 4.

[119] Ibid. II-II q. 102, a. 4, ad 3.

[120] St. Augustine. Confessions, tr. by Rex Warner, (New York: Mentor-Omega Books, New American Library of World Literature, 1963) Bk. X, Ch. 36.

it the obligation of the profoundest gratitude and friendship, or, on the other hand, it may produce the fearful effect of sensing one's foundations pulled from under him. There is no choice as to accepting or refusing the gift, since without it we are not. The only thing that can be refused is gratefulness and its concomitant obligation of returning the love and friendship with which this most precious gift was given.

A possible first sin

As we gradually grow in self-understanding we can't help but question our origin and essence. To avoid this knowledge of dependence the only other alternative is denial - a delusion must be created, a lie must be lived. Satan seems to be the proto-type of this, and indeed, our Lord says of the Devil that "he was a liar from the beginning" (Jn. 8:44). The lie that must be lived is that the person receives his being and essence from himself -he makes himself like God. And to reinforce this delusion he seeks to be adored as God is (cf. Is. 14:13-14; Apoc. ch. 13). During our Lord's temptation in the desert, Satan seeks worship from him. After showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world he says to him:

> All these things I will bestow on you if you prostrate yourself before me. At this Jesus said to him "Away with you Satan! Scripture has it: "You shall do homage to the Lord your God; him alone shall you adore". (Mt. 4:9-10)

Note that he never offers our Lord friendship in exchange for this worship, for this is one of the things pride destroys.

The first species of pride gives birth to the other three which

either follow upon it or support it, and once reigning in a person, isolation follows. The inter-relation between the four species of pride seems to be as follows: The first species gives rise to the second, in as much as if one is so independently excellent s/he naturally deserves whatever else s/he receives; the third species, "when they boast of having what they have not", supports the first in its belief of excellence and in this way also supports the second; the fourth, "despising others and wishing to appear as the exclusive possessor of what they have" falsely demeans the good which others possess and therefore elevates the person in his/her own eyes, however, this adds a new complication to the picture which we will discuss under envy. The factor common to all the above species of pride is its insulating effect, that is, the person remains static --if you are wonderful and perfect, there is no need to change, no need to undergo the risk that that involves.

In relation to God, St. Thomas sees pride as giving rise to presumption which, he says, unreasonably depends upon God in confronting realty. It expresses itself as:

> an inordinate trust in the Divine mercy or power, consisting in the hope of obtaining glory without merits, or pardon without repentance....[it] seems to arise directly from pride as though man thought so much of himself as to esteem that God would not punish him or exclude him from glory, however much he might be a sinner.[121]

There is no grateful response to God for salvation by way of repentance and an effort to change one's life.

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[121] St. Thomas. Summa Theologica, II-II q. 21, a. 4.

The proud person, then, lives a delusion. He ascribes to himself goods and qualities which he is not responsible for and instead of their serving as a means of communication with God and neighbour, they instead isolate him, frustrating any possibility for the true happiness of love and for self-realization.[122] The proud person is always thinking of himself, there is no self-forgetfulness; no willingness to die for its friends. Self-preservation is justified at the expense of others, since the pride-filled person is the most excellent and worthy to be sacrificed for. The opposite of this is humble service to others, forgetfulness of self which finds joy in others and is willing to die for them -especially the beloved, in whom s/he is captivated and wishes to surrender to (not possess). This brings light to the mystery of life itself in which love is willing to die for the beloved. A paradox which can only be resolved if there is a continuation of life after death.

The flight from truth, which the proud exhibit, is a flight from reality, and ultimately leads to hatred of others for opposing their version of truth. Such is the fundamental and over-riding importance of truth or reality to the human being. St. Augustine made this observation regarding truth:

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[122] The Second Vatican Council Documents emphasize this point in their anthropology. e.g. "For by his innermost nature man is a social being; and if he does not enter into relations with others he can neither live nor develop his gifts." (Gaudium et spes, n. 12); "man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere gift of himself (ibid. n. 24). Vatican Council II - The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, A. Flannery, O.P., gen. ed., (Northport, New York: Costello Pub. Co., 1981).

> I have met many people who wanted to deceive but no one who wanted to be deceived.[123]

Yet, with truth being so important, he wondered why people hated him for telling them the truth and so he asks the question, "But why is it that truth gives rise to hatred?" His reply is an insightful one:

> It is because truth is loved in such a way that those who love something else would like to believe that what they love is truth, and because they would not like to be deceived they object to being shown that in fact they are deceived. And so they hate the truth for the sake of whatever it is they love instead of truth.[124]

In this instance the person has lost the peace of being ignorant in their self-deception. And hence they live in turmoil which the truth of their self-deception now constantly afflicts them with. Therefore, they can no longer rest in the object of their desire as they did before.[125] The loss of this ignorance, instead of converting them to the truth, becomes the source of hatred. And since God is the source of all truth they begin to resent and hate God himself. This hatred of one's neighbour and of God leads us to two other vices: "envy" and "spiritual apathy" or "sloth". Looking at these we hope to gain some further insights into the reasons for a loss of perception, or a flight from,

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[123] St. Augustine. Confessions, opus cit., Bk. 10, Ch. 23.

[124] Ibid.

[125] "man's heart is not at peace, so long as he has not what he wants, or if, having what he wants, there still remains something for him to want, and which he cannot have at the same time." Here the person seeks both the joy of truth and the object of untruth. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, II-II q. 29, a. 1.

truth.

Envy and Spiritual Apathy

Among the sins against charity, St Thomas notes two which are opposed to the very joy of love.[126] They are envy,[127] which is sadness over the good in another; and spiritual apathy or sloth, which is sadness over the divine good[128]. Joy or sadness themselves are evoked when one either rests in good (evoking joy) or is faced with unavoidable evil or the loss of good (evoking sadness).[129] Hence to be sad over another's good or the divine good is to perceive that good as an evil in relation to self. This happens as far as envy is concerned in what St. Thomas and St. Gregory had termed the fourth species of pride: "to despise

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[126] Ibid. II-II q. 35, preamble.

[127] St. Thomas distinguishes the vice of envy from other causes of sorrow over another's good which go by the same name. He says that sorrow for another's good can come about "First when that man grieves for another's good through fear that it may cause him actual harm" e.g., it may give an enemy means by which it can harm him/her, and "this type is not envy and can be free from sin". The second kind is the zeal that is caused by desiring to obtain the same goods for yourself that you see in another. This may or may not be sinful; "if this zeal is about virtuous goods it is praiseworthy". The third kind is an indignation over goods received by those whom one judges as unworthy. This would not be in reference to spiritual goods "since these make a man righteous", but rather regarding riches, since to be envious of them is not to consider things from an eternal perspective, and that God gives what He wills "for correction or condemnation". In the end God will judge all things. This type of indignation weakens one's resolve to adhere to God's commands since it sees the prosperity of sinners without apparent condemnation. It is always sinful. The fourth kind is the envy we will be discussing, "and is always sinful...because to do so is to grieve over what should make us rejoice, viz. over our neighbor's good". Ibid. q. 36, a. 2.

[128] Ibid. q. 35, a. 2 and q. 36, a. 1.

[129] Ibid. I-II q. 25, a. 1.

others and wish to appear the exclusive possessor of what they have". This was a means to support the delusion of excellence in which the proud person found his/her joy and security, and hence, the good in another was perceived as a threat.

"Spiritual apathy", the divine good perceived as an evil to oneself, is a more complicated issue and brings us to what has traditionally been understood as ingratitude for, and the rejection of, an unavoidable gift -the rejection of reality itself in regard to God's creation of us and of our destiny. This will be looked at more closely after the discussion on envy.

Envy

Although the envious person finds some joy in contributing to maintaining the notion of excellence in conjunction with pride, in itself, it is a very bitter and fearful existence. At the root of envy is a fearful dissatisfaction with one's own gifts, particularly the inner core of one's being.

The happiness of the envious person does not lie in receiving honor and reverence, as it does in the person where pride predominates, but rather in thinking him/herself relatively perfect. Therefore, whenever someone else has similar gifts in near proportion[130] to the gifts wherein he finds his own delight,

[130] The reason why the person does not get upset in reference to someone who super-excells them is that they have set relative limits as to what perfection is plausible for them given their gifts, and they are happy with that. "a man is envious of those (continued...)

he fears, demeans, and even hates[131] or tries to destroy that good in them so that he remains superior. Otherwise, in his own eyes, he feels himself less perfect and loves himself less because of this knowledge of his own imperfection or inadequacy. Each person has a certain image of themselves, the ego, which is his conscious estimation of self. There can be dissatisfaction with self for various motives, however, the most inescapable one is that the exterior self which comes into comparison with others is the product of the most interior core of one's existence -the personal "I"- from which everything else flows. And if through falling short in exterior comparisons, this inmost centre is found wanting, what can one do? There is no way of improving this personal "I"[132] -it is a given which has to be accepted. Hence the person's sadness stems from this realization of his/her own inescapable imperfection and not the good, per se, in others except that their good reveals to the person that s/he is lacking.

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[130](...continued)
only whom he wishes to rival or surpass in reputation. But this does not apply to people who are far removed from one another: for no man, unless he be out of his mind, endeavors to rival or surpass in reputation those who are far above him." Ibid. II-II q. 36, a. 1.

[131] Envy can give rise to hatred which completely destroys charity. "just as love arises from pleasure, so does hatred arise from sorrow. For just as we are moved to love whatever gives rise to pleasure, in as much as for that very reason it assumes the aspect of good; so we are moved to hate whatever displeases us, in so far as for this very reason it assumes the aspect of evil. Wherefore, since envy is sorrow over our neighbor's good, it follows that our neighbor's good becomes hateful to us, so that 'out of envy cometh hatred'." Ibid. II-II q. 34, a. 6.

[132] (Except through communion with one greater than oneself, which is only attained through love)

To the non-believer the conclusion may express itself as "Life has short-changed me. It isn't just, but I will just have to live with it." For the believer, however, there is dissatisfaction with the gift God has given, and ultimately a dissatisfaction with the giver -God. "Somehow He made a mistake," or more likely, "He loves me less," -a horrible and devastating conclusion.

For the non-believer and the believer alike, one of the cures for envy is the love of friendship.[133] It unites and forms a bridge such that one identifies with the friend and hence his/her gifts and achievements are perceived as one's own. They are a cause of joy and gratitude rather than envy. And so too, each one's sorrows unites them in compassionate love. The problem is, though, that envy by its very nature misrepresents the truth about the good in others to preserve its own superiority: "they despise others". Likewise, their hearts are closed to their neighbour's needs for "they think them wicked, so they account them as suffering deservedly whatever they suffer".[134] So their hearts do not go out and unite with others by means of mercy either. Envy, then, carries with it, by its very nature, a self-defeating contradiction which perpetuates its isolation from others.

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[133] "When a man loves another with the love of friendship he wills good to him, just as he wills good to himself: wherefore he apprehends him as his other self." Ibid. I-II q. 27, a. 1.

[134] Ibid. II-II q.30, a.2, ad 3. As in the case of Cornelius Raymount in Weighed and Wanting. He judged the old man deserving of his misery and had no compassion on him.

He love's me less

For the believer who suffers from envy the gifts in others are not nearly the obstacle to friendship as they are in the non-believer since s/he knows that others are not responsible for their gifts. ("Name something you have that you have not received." I Cor. 4:7) and therefore s/he doesn't go so far as to hate the individuals, but rather simply thinks that God possibly has been unfair to him. Also, since through the gift of divine life he knows that he will share in the perfection of Christ's resurrection, the passing perfections or imperfections of this world are small in comparison. ("I have come to rate all as loss in the light of the surpassing knowledge of my Lord Jesus Christ." Phil. 3:8) However, his awareness of apparent differences in gifts between his brothers and sisters in Christ if not causing envy, at least confirms that God has been unfair in his giving, and somehow loves him of her less.

Does the fact that a person receives less gifts than another indeed mean that God loves them less? To answer this question, one has to consider the uniqueness of each individual and those things which actually help him or her to love God as much as they can with their unique irrepeatable "I". That is, if God creates each individual uniquely and irrepeatably they will need special gifts in order to bring that particular uniqueness to the perfection of love. God in his wisdom, then, must order all things to that end. The insightful awareness of these two facts, that is, one's absolute uniqueness in the gift of creation, and

God's providential care, causes a joy in the soul. The person sees how his limited gifts as well as his struggles and joys have contributed to his friendship with God; and how the things which others have, if given to him, would rather "clutter" and hinder the simplicity and depth of his relationship with God. Thus he begins to sense in the very core of his being how Providence is always arranging things so as to unite his particular uniqueness to Him the more, in a loving friendship which has charity at its root and joy and peace as its fruits. Hence, the person rejoices and is at peace with what he has uniquely been given by God since it is precisely in this limited gift that he is who he is, and by which his personal "I" can love God unlimitedly.

Given this fruition, this grasping of one's own special relationship with God, not only is the person grateful for his or her own gifts, but would not want to be anyone other than him/herself. Likewise, the gifts of others no longer pose the threat they had previously posed, but rather become a source of rejoicing and gratitude. In fact, the greater and more diverse gifts that they see in others, the more they rejoice as the apostles did upon hearing of the Holy Spirit's descent upon Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:1--11:18). For these very gifts in others further manifest to them the goodness and generosity of the One whom they have come to love. They no longer fear the truth about themselves or others. This also opens their eyes to their past and heals and reinterprets and thus integrates it in a healthy way.

One's past reinterpreted- Our life viewed in retrospect

There are healthy ways and unhealthy ways of viewing one's past in a new light. The unhealthy way is to become so preoccupied with your past wretchedness that you convince yourself that you cannot possibly rise above it in the present, even with God's help. The healthy way is to recognize God's merciful love expressed in his Providence when we were avoiding Him and seeking self, and really headed toward self-destruction. St. Augustine's Confessions are based on this type of reflective searching and illustrate well what we are trying to say.

The theme of the Confessions is that only in God can the human heart find true happiness: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their peace in You."[135] Within this theme he sets out how he experientially came to a knowledge of this truth after searching for happiness apart from God, and how God preserved him from himself by not allowing him to find satisfaction in creatures.[136] Each of the errors and sins which he recounts become occasions to praise God for his mercy for having rescued him from his false self:

> I want to call back to mind my past impurities and the carnal corruptions of my soul, not because I love them, but that so I may love you, my God. It is for

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[135] St. Augustine, Confessions, opus cit., Bk.1, Ch. 1.

[136] "I panted for honors, for money, for marriage, and you were laughing at me. I found bitterness and difficulty in following these desires. And your graciousness to me was shown in the way you would not allow me to find anything sweet that was not you." Ibid. Bk. VI, Ch. 6.

love of your love that I do it.[137]

In a similar passage he explains why this type of recollecting is beneficial:

> I do this for love of your love. For we pray also in spite of the fact that Truth has said: "Your Father knoweth what you have need of, before you ask." What we do, therefore, is to lay open our feelings to you, confessing to you our wretchedness and your acts of mercy to us, so that you may set us entirely free, as you have already begun to free us, and we may cease to be wretched in ourselves and may become happy in you.[138]

In this way one's points of weakness become occasions of strength in the Lord and one can say with St. Paul, "Therefore I am content with my weakness...for when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong."(II Cor. 12:10)

So what is now perceived as shameful, becomes so no longer; and this frees the person from possible self-hatred or self-punishment for past infidelities, and has also become the cause of greater awareness of God's goodness and love. This being the case it frees them from defense mechanisms of denial which cut them off from the reality of themselves, and therefore they are now better able to gather up all of themselves and so make a return gift to God. Augustine says it in other words:

> It is for love of your love that I do it, going back over those most wicked ways of mine in the bitterness of my recollection so that the bitterness may be replaced by the sweetness of you, O unfailing sweetness, happy and secure! And gathering myself together from the scattered fragments into which I was broken and dissipated during all that time....that what is scattered may be brought together so that nothing of

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[137] Ibid. Bk. II, Ch. 1.

[138] Ibid. Bk. XI, Ch. 1.

me may depart from you.[139]

Our life viewed with honest retrospection, then, can be a powerful means to interior healing and unification so that one's response to God's goodness can be more fully a complete gift of self.

Spiritual Apathy

As already stated, "spiritual apathy"[140] is sadness over the divine good. In fact, St Thomas calls it "an oppressive sorrow...which so oppresses man as to draw him away from good deeds"[141]. The exact cause of this sorrow's arising remains a bit of a mystery in Thomas' writings. He relates it to ingratitude when answering an objection to it possibly being caused by humility:

> It is a sign of humility if a man does not think too much of himself, through observing his own faults; but if a man contemns the good things he has received from God, this, far from being a proof of humility, shows him to be ungrateful: because we sorrow for things that we reckon evil and worthless.[142]

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[139] Ibid. Bk. II, Ch. 1; Bk. X, Ch. 40.

[140] The term "spiritual apathy" better carries the meaning which "sloth" had for the Medievals. In today'a vocabulary "sloth" tends to mean laziness, which could be seen more as an effect of this vice rather than the vice itself. Hence, "spiritual apathy" will be used as an interchangeable term with "sloth" when quoting St. Thomas. Likewise, Josef Pieper uses the Greek term "acedia" when speaking about this vice, for the same reasons stated above. Hence, when quoting Pieper, "acedia" and "spiritual apathy" and "sloth" will be used interchangeably. Thus, throughout this section the three terms are completely interchangeable and refer to the same vice.

[141] St. Thomas. Summa Theologica, II-II q. 35, a. 1.

[142] Ibid. II-II q. 35, a.1, ad 2.

However, why the person considers the divine good as an evil or without worth to him or her is not addressed by Thomas.

The Thomist, Josef Pieper, in his book On Hope, in his analysis of "acedia" in relation to despair takes this question up, and says that the reason for sorrow over supernatural goods which God offers is that they "are by their very nature, linked to a claim on him who receives them".[143] He continues:

> As a capital sin, sloth is man's joyless, illtempered, and narrowminded self-seeking rejection of the nobility of the children of God with all the obligations it entails. As a genuine possibility and necessity, however, this "being a child of God" is an irrevocable fact that no one can alter. And since this irrevocable fact, which is not to be compared with the external offer of some gift or other, is precisely the renewal of man's whole nature at the center of his being, "acedia" means, in the last analysis, that man will not be what he really is.[144]

Pieper makes several interesting observations. First, that a person being a child of God is "an irrevocable gift", i.e., inescapable. Secondly, along with this, is that it is "linked to a claim on him who receives it". And thirdly, that this claim is for "a renewal of the man's whole nature at the center of his being" (a rather frightening situation to find oneself in). And because of this the person is sad and flees the thought of divine goodness. The gift comes with too large a price tag, so

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[143] Josef Pieper. On Hope, tr. by Sr. Mary Frances McCarthy, S.N.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986) p. 56.

[144] Ibid. pp.56-57. Similarly, MacDonald says of essence of the evil of sin in the human being that it is "the miserable fact that the very child of God does not care for his father and will not obey him, causing us to desire wrongly, act wrongly, or, where we try not to act wrongly, yet making it impossible for us not to feel wrongly..." (The Hope of the Gospel, opus cit., p. 17.)

to speak. Reality becomes too frightful.

The means of overcoming "spiritual apathy", Thomas says, is to discover through persevering attention and greater insight, that, indeed participation in the divine good is worth the personal sacrifice involved:

> Sin is ever to be shunned...sometimes by flight, sometimes by resistance, when perseverence in the thought diminishes the incentive to sin, which incentive arise from some trivial consideration. This is the case with sloth, because the more we think about spiritual goods, the more pleasing they become to us, and forthwith sloth dies away.[145]

Pieper agrees with St. Thomas as to this means of overcoming spiritual apathy and adds the need for courage and magnanimity:

> Temptations to "acedia" and despair can be overcome only by the vigilant resistance of an alert and steady watchfulness...by that clear-sighted magnanimity that courageously expects and has confidence in the greatness of its own nature and by the grace-filled impetus of the hope of eternal life.[146]

Yet, instead of doing this they end up "fleeing these thoughts" as St. Thomas would put it;[147] and it leaves the person in a constant state of procrastination, putting off the very thing that will bring him happiness. And in the end, instead of at last paying the price for the gift, i.e., the return gift of self, he succumbs to what has been understood as conscious ingratitude and rejection, by way of despair, into affirming the

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[145] St. Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologica, II-II q. 35, a. 1, ad 4.

[146] Josef Pieper. On Hope, opus cit., p. 60.

[147] cf. St. Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologica, II-II q. 35, a. 4, ad 2 and ad 3.

prideful delusion that he does not need God after all:

> The root and origin of despair is the slothful sadness of "acedia". But its "perfection" is accompanied by pride.
>
> Acedia is in the last analysis, a "detestio boni divini", with the monstrous result that, upon reflection, man expressly wishes that God had not ennobled him, but had "left him in peace".[148]

But from where comes the insight?

The traditional position which St. Thomas and Pieper articulate, has placed a culpable responsibility on the person for failing to respond. While they rightly describe the fear and turmoil of the person who must make a leap of faith, and even the recriminations of cowardice and a lack of magnanimity that one's conscience might afflict him with, yet are they taking into account the absolute human need for understanding to overcome fear? Haven't they really blamed the person for not violating this basic human need?

Knowledge is received according to the mode of the receiver. And until there is sufficient likeness to God in the receiver through moral growth, there will never be sufficent understanding to overcome the fear. And it is only when this is overcome that a final response can be truly made. Then, a penetrating reflective gaze cannot help but elicit a joy over the gift and

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[148] Josef Pieper. On Hope, opus cit., pp. 60 and 56 respectively. Here Pieper is quoting and following St. Thomas from his de Malo q. 8, a. 1, ad 7 and the Summa Theologica, II-II q. 35, a. 3.

a personal positive response.

This classical position closes the door to further moral growth through learning by way of this failure -this rejection of God- and the deeper understanding which that would bring about. It does not allow for learning in this way which would open the door to future conversion and communion with God.

Pride, envy, and sloth all seem to be rooted in insecurity -in fear- resulting in a self-defeating effort at self-maintenance without the risk nor the enrichment of communion with others, including God. This fear, which both protects and isolates, was the same reaction as the "angst" which the Existentialists identify when freedom and responsibility are recognized by the fragile finite creature. Likewise, Carl Rogers expressed his dismay that even when he achieves the threefold conditions of a helping relationship in himself, the client might, out of fear not be able to take advantage of his help. How then, to overcome the painful risk and the fear which this produces? Is it not through the inner true self -the personal "I" which, in conscience, is ever evaluating whether to convict itself or to acquit itself after taking a doubtful decision. And through the pain of suffering, be it from one's own guilty conscience and personal misery, or simply the inability to attain happiness alone, it all leads to movement and learning and to choices that result in change and greater learning: all ratified by experience.

What has traditionally been interpreted as damnation -the final rejection of God, we feel could better be interpreted as failure in this present temporal framework which yields deeper learning and change. In the Gospel (Lk. 16:19-31), Lazarus the beggar is seen as being separated from the rich man by an uncrossable chasm. Yet the rich man in his suffering has gained a new perspective about what things are truly important and how they bring happiness or misery, this reflected in his asking Lazarus to warn his brothers who are still alive to change their lives lest they end up as he has. A clear indication of new insight.

For some, it seems that this life is predominated by their willful choosing of things which progressively reveal their selfishness; and only when this has reached a point of unbearableness do they even begin to appear to be learning about genuine self-giving love. Of these, MacDonald says "although every mind is capable of the truth, or rather capable of becoming capable of the truth, there may lie ages between its capacity and the truth"[149]. What they are doing with their present lives must be the accruing of irrefutable evidence of their own selfishness and its concomitant and resultant misery, that this painful knowledge may someday be used to their benefit -but apparently not in this life. Why some people progress towards holiness and others towards selfishness must all be contained in the universal principal of the human being as a learner[150]: as one

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[149] George MacDonald. Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood, opus cit., ch. 7, p. 92.

[150] "Age is such a different thing in different natures! One man seems to grow more and more selfish as he grows older; and in another the slow fire of time seems only to consume, with (continued...)

who only freely chooses when the object is perceived as self-enriching.

The Fatherhood of God

It has been said of MacDonald that he rediscovered the Fatherhood of God. And as was noted in chapter I, this "discovery" guided and informed all of his theology. Aside from his writing style, one of the few substantial criticisms of him was that he could not create convincing villians in his novels. Evil was something which he seemed uniterested or even unable to gain insight into; or perhaps he viewed it as an uninteresting phase of humanity.[151]

Some have sought to criticize his overflowing confidence in the goodness of God and have suggested that its source was actually a by-product associated with his consumption, something he struggled with his whole life. While this observation with regard to consumptives has some foundation, in the case of MacDonald his life witnesses to a genuine faith and hope. Four of his children and a grandchild died within his lifetime and he

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[150](...continued)
fine, imperceptable gradations, the yet lingering selfishness in him, letting the light of the kingdom, which the Lord says is within, shine out more and more, as the husk grows thin and is ready to fall off, that the man like the seed sown, may pierce the earth of this world, and rise into the pure air and wind and dew of the second life." Ibid., pp. 97-98. While both are learning, for some it is through impending failure, for others obedience predominates.

[151] In his novel Thomas Wingfold, while describing the character of Emmeline (a girl who was murdered by her jealous lover), he limits his analysis of her excusing his brevity by saying: "Of morbid anatomy save for the setting forth of a cure, I am not fond..." (opus cit., p. 126)

was constantly dogged by poverty and ill-health; but throughout, his life was consistent with his writings.

Why shouldn't the deep conviction of God as Father of humanity speak to the creature of inexorable love both in regard to him\herself and to his brothers and sisters? Hence, MacDonald's confidence that the human being cannot possibly thwart Eternal Love's plans through his or her freedom flows naturally from this premise. Evil and rebellion cannot possibly last:

> That God could not do the thing at once which he takes time to do, we may surely say without irreverence. His will cannot finally be thwarted; where it is thwarted for a time, the very thwarting subserves the working out of a higher part of his will. He gave man the power to thwart his will, that, by means of that same power, he might come at last to do his will in a higher way than could otherwise have been possible to him.[152]

It all leads to an inescapable destiny. In a way, MacDonald has carried with him the unrelenting childhood God of his Calvinist upbringing, but has recast Him into the unrelenting Father-God of Jesus Christ, whose will it is that all come to a knowledge of his Son and be saved. MacDonald proposed a theology based on a God who is Love. He felt that a God other than this would be worse than no God at all and would ever be a threat to human growth and happiness.[153]

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[152] George Macdonald. Unspoken Sermons 3rd series (1889) "The Final Unmasking" (Whitehorn, California: Johannesen Publishers, 1997 reprint of 1889 edition by Alexander Strahan and Longmans, Green & Co,.) p. 593.

[153] "For it is of far more consequence what kind of God, than whether a God or no" (Robert Falconer, opus cit., p.166)

CONCLUSION

The understanding of Man as a being ever "in-relation-to" God: vitally dependent on Him for his "origin, nature, condition, dignity and destiny", that is, in a dynamic on-going continuum, is seen by those advocating a theological anthropology as giving meaning to what it means to be human. This approach or understanding is informed by Revelation, but shaped by human nature, a revelation itself.

The effort to find more satisfying theories about God and Man must inevitably be realized through the power of imagination. From what is already known and experienced, imagination seeks to harmonize and extrapolate further. The proving of these new theories must always be discerned from lived experience. But, as a basic guideline, the proposals should be in accordance with what the Gospel reveals about the God of Jesus Christ and with what the human being knows about himself. George MacDonald was a master of such imaginative extrapolation and his using "the knowledge of the heart" as **the** according factor was where his true genius lay. Because of this, his theology and anthropology harmonize in a way which imaginatively satisfies the human need for unconditional love, for justice, for mercy, for salvation and for meaning. His is not an unintelligible God, nor a God which restricts human growth, but rather a God who is in all, through all, <u>for all</u>, or as St.Paul puts it "Who is all in all". Rather than being at odds with the human being He is ever for the human being as source, sustainer, and final destiny in which the mystery of Man is revealed and all the longings of the human

heart are satisfied.

MacDonald loathed "systems of theology" and would not want his ideas to come to be "worshipped" instead of the living God. But his simple acknowledgment, without reservation, that God is all good, that he is love is a basis which will endure. We hope that this study of theological anthropology in the writings of George MacDonald will provide a basis and an incentive for further study and appreciation of this gifted man's works, especially for his approach to theology.

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